

June 6, 2010 - Pentecost 2
The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

“Lord take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire for your Holy Gospel.” Amen.

I will call him Thomas to protect his identity. He was a challenging 10-year-old Caucasian boy born into South Carolina’s poverty. Thomas and I, along with Angela, one of our counselors, spent the better part of this past Tuesday trying to get him to adjust to being at Camp Bob, Kanuga in Hendersonville. He had a very rough first night and his first full day at camp wasn’t going that well either—this rather small boy for his age did not listen at all to the counselors and was simply unable to get along with the other boys in his cabin. The 86 boys and girls we brought, ages 8 to 14, seemed to overwhelm Thomas in a way that made him incapable of being with them. Thomas wanted to leave camp.

I am not sure how well you or I would have done at camp if we at age 10 had experienced what Thomas had in his short span of years. Thomas was a foster child. He did not speak to me about his biological mother; however he did tell me some things in my

counseling time with him in between table-tennis matches that pulled at my heart strings about as hard as they have ever been pulled.

“You don’t want to know where my father is,” he suddenly blurted out. “Is he in jail?” I responded. “He is going to die there.” My dad sold drugs and got caught with them in my sister’s car. He is 40 years old and got 20 years. He’ll be dead.” As I spoke to Thomas, he in a breathless way revealed more of his story, like the fact that he had been in fourteen foster homes in the last year alone. I saw in Thomas’ eyes a child fighting for his life, feeling all alone with no one on his side.

Thomas and I also spoke lots about baseball—he knew standings, players, and statistics. He challenged me about how I could be both a New York Yankees’ fan and an Atlanta Braves’ fan as well. We also discovered that we were both about to turn a year older, seven days apart. And I wondered what he looked forward to in the coming year. I so wanted to give him a new life, and yet I could not. Along with David, the camp director and Thomas’s social worker, we decided that the best thing for Thomas was to honor his decision to leave camp and get him to his foster mother.

Of the more than 500 children Trinity has sponsored for Camp Bob, Thomas was the first not to make it for the whole week.

Yesterday when I read the lessons upon which I was to preach today, I was reminded again that you and I are not Jesus. Jesus was approaching the entrance gate to the town of Nain, at the moment that a man who had died was being carried out. He was going in and the dead man was going out to be buried. We are told that the dead man's mother was a widow and he was her only son. These facts included by Luke in the gospel are not incidental to the narrative—to be a widow without a man to take care of you in first century Palestine meant most likely a terrible life of hardship and poverty.

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, rise!' The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. (Luke 7) Throughout his three short years of ministry, it was perhaps his healings and bringing the dead to life that gave Jesus such a rapid and vast notoriety. We hear in this story that, *Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God...* God worked through his Son Jesus in such dramatic ways that both the

truth of Christ's identity and the breaking forth of the kingdom of God became known and widespread. Healing and new life was of course not new to God, as we heard in today's reading from First Kings where the prophet Elijah hundreds of years before Christ, calls out to God for healing upon the son of the woman from Zarephath. What was new was that now it was through one man, Jesus of Nazareth, the very Son of God.

Very few of us will be given by God the gift to heal as Jesus healed. We are not able to raise someone from the dead. And yet, there is a remarkable calling that has been placed upon you as a disciple of Jesus Christ—you and I have been chosen to stop, to notice, and to encounter the other, the stranger.

Within her latest book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes: *Watch how this rabbi practices what he preaches and you will note that his teaching is not limited to people who look, act, or think like him. He does the same eye-to-eye thing with the Roman centurions, Samaritan lepers, Syro-Phoenician women, and hostile Judeans that he does with his own Galilean disciples. He does it with slaves and rulers, twelve-year-old girls and powerful men, people who can be useful to him and people who cannot...no one is dismissed from his circle of concern, for no one*

made in God's image is negligible in the revelation of that same God. Taylor goes on to say, You shall love the stranger first of all because you know what it is to be a stranger yourself. Second of all, you shall love the stranger because the stranger shows you God. (p.96-97)

You and I cannot give a new life to children like Thomas. We cannot heal them of all of their hurts and injuries. We can though, in the Name of Jesus notice them, (and other strangers) seek to understand them, serve them, and offer to them the love of Christ. They in turn, will show you God. **+Amen.**