

When and how does God respond to need?

Have you ever been really busy

And trying to get something important done and yet you keep getting interrupted? What's on your To Do List today – couldn't you be doing something more important today or enjoyable. You must have seen something greater bigger that means you have made this a priority despite everything else you are called to achieve.

Ava Jeanne McCormack, her parents Andrew and Kirsty – also, Daisy-May, her parents Ashley and Kady - I imagine they have no difficulty thinking of all the others pressures that they feel and yet they have chosen to be here, to put Jesus as a priority for their children, to notice to pay attention and to take time out from their lives to thank God.

The boy on the seashore ...

A man was walking along a beach with his son and thousands of starfish had been washed ashore and were flailing about drying out and close to death.

The boy picked up a starfish and threw it back into the sea. His father responded, son why did you bother you'll never be able to throw them all back. No said the boy but I know it made a difference to the one that did make it back into the water. One starfish was saved from certain death. The boy noticed and had compassion.

[I wonder how it feels to be GOD](#)

what with running the universe and all, but these pesky humans keep wanting or needing things from you. How does God handle all the emails? In our readings today it's clear that God is full of compassion for those in dire straits and doesn't even require prayer to respond to the need. God is a compassionate God and is the best example of loving parenthood we could hope for.

[Jesus wandering](#)

around the countryside was moved to intervene and those on the fringes on the margins he placed at the centre of his ministry, at the top of his agenda. Saving the world from its own self-centred, destructive nature, began in his mind with the

individual, the slave, the adulterous woman, the thieving tax collector, the infected, the unclean the outsider. Jesus stops and notices when someone touches his cloak. With a whole world to save, Jesus stops and has time for the widow the orphan and today even the dead. And that's because careful attention to the small things can have a massive impact. Remember the starfish – a small gesture but who could measure the result – I'll bet that starfish had something to tell the echinoderms back home - the **echinoderms** include **sea urchins**, sand dollars, brittle and basket stars, **sea cucumbers** and crinoids.

[Picture the scene in today's readings](#)

A funeral processions gets interrupted and the corpse is ordered to sit up and is handed back to his mother. What would the young man say – I've got a stiff neck?

How would the mother feel – was this a ghost? She's not only been afraid for her future but now she's given her son, her only son back. One moment

she's facing financial ruin with no husband to support her and now her only son is dead too. Now she's famous as the widow whose son is resurrected.

Jesus hands the young man back

to his mother and this echoes other scenes from the bible where an only child is given back to its parent. This reminds us of the resurrected Christ. St Luke here is preparing the ground for the reader. But perhaps Jesus also is helping the followers, his disciples anticipate his own death and resurrection by enacting it here. This is the healer from Galilee, this is the man who has power over the waves, over water and wine, this is the man who heals the sick, the blind see the deaf hear. Wait a minute, that's who the Israelites had been waiting for some four hundred years or more.

God had been noticeably absent

and yet here was this great prophet in their midst – they thought Elijah had returned and now God's favour was upon them once more. Now their

fortunes would be restored, blessing would inevitably come.

Yet in John the Baptist, the way had already been made straight and here the one everyone had been waiting for, well he was here. Phew – I wonder if the relief for the widow and the concern for her here pales into insignificance and the crowd is concerned more for their own prospects now.

Of all the sayings and miracles

Jesus was responsible for, why choose this one in particular. Only St Luke includes it but his concern is to focus our minds on the question – who is this? Who is this outsider from Galilee, this stone mason's son, this commoner who debates so brilliantly in the synagogue with the other rabbis? Who is this radical that touches a coffin and defiles himself and goes against all the requirements for purification necessary for a respectable religious leader of the day.

In the reading from 1 Kings,

Elijah is told to go to pagan country, a land of Baal worship and there is reliant upon the kindness of a pagan woman who is preparing the last meal for herself and her son before they die of starvation. Here we have a story of another widow and her son in a desperate situation and God uses the prophet Elijah to save her. However, this account also to serve a higher purpose – to point the woman to the one in whom Elijah puts his trust. ‘Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is in your mouth’

In both accounts,

from Luke and 1 Kings it is God who gets the glory and strangers are made aware that the Kingdom of God is near. Yet it’s tempting to think that if only God really showed up in an impressive way today, that everyone would believe.

Imagine the reactions

from the crowds if there was a resurrection in Bedminster this morning – not everyone would

believe it, some would say – it's a fix, some perhaps would say it's witchcraft some might say I won't believe whatever. There have always been doubters and sceptics and it's right that we are cautious. All too often fraud and misdemeanours, corruption and dishonesty have tragically blighted the very institutions and leaders in whom we should have been able to put our trust.

The crowds following Jesus

meets the crowd following the coffin – some are doubters, some are mourners, perhaps some are there for a spectacle or selling snacks to anyone who will buy?

It's easy to miss the fact that Jesus raises someone from the dead and does so out of pure compassion – no-one asks him to, The LORD as he is referred to here in this unique passage to Luke, it's as if we're being called once again by the author to consider – look who is this man who commands widows not to cry, corpses to rise and as we saw last week, orders

a fatally sick slave to be well without even meeting him.

Compassion Fatigue

Are you tired of begging letters, irritated by Big Issue sellers, sick of benefit scroungers, frustrated by fat cat charities, annoyed by Whitehall bureaucrats mismanaging the foreign aid budget? You're not alone. Compassion fatigue, being tired of requests for help, is a known condition that many of us feel. I get tired of requests for help sometimes. I wonder, how does God cope with need and endless requests for help?

Surely charity begins at home?

Some say why bother with overseas aid when we have areas of high deprivation in our own deanery.

When I walk around the city

I get irritated with my complex responses to the homeless confronting me of the issues associated with the marginalised. Some tell me there's a fat profit to be made begging as a professional. Others say it doesn't help the long term situation. Others say the homeless don't want the responsibility of

running a home with its bills to pay and upkeep to manage.

Yet, the recent response

to the Christian Aid appeal to help Bangladesh was fantastic. Thank you. Your generosity, energy, enthusiasm to help those you will never meet speaks volumes to cynical world that implodes with self-centredness and materialism, you have responded to a need, you have shown compassion. Be glad, rejoice and celebrate with me today that this matters, God sees your heart-felt response, you have freely chosen to respond in a Christ-like way – all things come from you and of your own do we give you.

During my trips to Uganda

I was bombarded with requests for money, where was I to draw the line. People told me, 'When anyone says it's not about the money, its always about the money'. Well-meaning foreign aid agencies and NGOs have often charged in with good intentions yet failed to listen and understand the local issues. A century of pouring money into Africa has not stopped poverty. This is why I'm

encouraged by the approach taken by Christian Aid which is long-established and large enough to keep admin to a minimum, well-connected enough to give us regular updates from those impacted by the aid and rooted in Christ which is the best defence against corruption I can think of. Safe hands to safe hands and the approach is to train up local people for a sustainable future – you can't sell or steal training.

South Bristol has the lowest number

in the country of youngsters going to university. When I hear of the realities of life for some in Knowle West especially I realised how sheltered most of us are. No oven means never a hot meal, no bed means sleeping on the floor. Apparently, junior school children do quite well but when they feel the peer pressure at secondary school they don't want to do well in case it would isolate them from their own family and friends.

I get requests for help at The Rectory

– how to discern the genuine – I'd rather be naïve and generous than cynical and mean. I'd rather the

church looks gullible than stingy. One lady came here on Good Friday saying she was pregnant, had left her abusive partner and because it was the Bank Holiday weekend had no means to get any money to buy food or fill up the electricity meter – I wonder, what would you have thought and done?

Question is – what happens now?

To the Bangladesh appeal and to other compassion locally and abroad? It's not as if the requests for help will stop....

did Jesus ever get tired of being pestered?

How does God handle our requests for help – does He listen, does He see? Very much does he! How might God respond to requests for help – in variety of ways it seems, but I believe He always hears our requests for help and sometimes intervenes even without being asked – we are told the Holy Spirit knows what's on our tongue before we've even spoken it.

The Victorians had a solution

to the problem of what they saw as the undeserving poor. The workhouses were deliberately unpleasant to ensure that no-one went there unless they were absolutely desperate. Do we have in our minds who might be the undeserving and the deserving I wonder?

The Welfare State

Brought the idea that the state would provide. This unintentionally took pressure away from the previous responsibility of the wealthy and the church to care for the destitute. We stopped looking to one another for help we stopped noticing the need around us and directing people instead to the authorities. Compassion became centralised, help was in the form of a faceless institution.

The culture in first century Galilee

was one of a tightly knit community and family responsibilities even hospitality to the stranger was strong. The widow in our gospel reading is described in detail as having only one son to highlight the plight she was facing with the demise

in her social standing and the loss of any form of income having first lost her husband and now her only son. Although the support network for widows and orphans was quite close, yet still some fell through the net.

[In this passage unique to Luke](#)

was are confronted with a messiah who notices who sees and intervenes even though here no request was made. God steps in with compassion in the person of Jesus and the funeral procession is both fearful and turns to glorify God. Why fearful – that is a correct response when we realise we are in the presene of God, and the crowd knew that God was present, close, nearby. Luke makes this realisation abundantly clear because he quotes directly from 1 Kings 17.

[funding for children with SEN](#)

are unlikely to receive the funding they require in order to get the best from their education. I am confident God lays particular concerns or interests in each of our lives and its ok to focus on one or two and leave the rest to God and to others – you

cannot do it all. Choose one or two things and do them well and effectively. Choose your starfish – my starfish is likely to be SEN

But we need help and to learn to discern, to be wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove.

What can be done – long term sustainable development and training, short term solutions.

Here then is a test

for whether or not we can have confidence in healers – who gets the glory and where does the money go? We're rightly nervous of the TV evangelist, the showman who fixes people instantly and the whooping crowd showers money at the figure clad in the white suit and bouffon hair do.

But genuine healing happens, and we must continue to notice and ask for it and then wait and see when and where and how God answers – we can be sure he heres but like any parent the answer might be yes, no, wait or here's a better idea.

Despite the skepticism

and anxiety about authority and organized religion, Jesus' reputation is valid and known and respected. There are 2.9 billion Christians apparently in the world and of the 2.8 billion Muslims – they hold Jesus in high esteem as a special particular great prophet. The people didn't follow Jesus then and many won't follow him now.

So if people won't even follow

when Jesus raises someone from the dead before their very eyes – ladies and gentleman roll up roll up – what are we expected to do what can we do? We are given the mission orders to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy spirit? Has God given us an impossible task, how do we serve obediently when its mission impossible?

What's your starfish?

– will you be overwhelmed and ignore all the starfish or will you make the difference to the one in your path, the one God calls your attention to.

When you're really busy....

In the year 1800

how many people attended Holy Communion that year – have a guess? ... eight people! The church was seen as out of date and irrelevant, the church was dying. Yet the gospel has survived every onslaught, every intellectual assault, crossed continents, cultural barriers, overturned dictators, brought down rules and transformed the lives of billions.

Time and again we read that God is looking for a faithful remnant, that is a few people who will remain faithful to him and get back to basics – when people turn back to God in pray, fasting worship yes and even bible study – then everything else follows.

We have a fantastic amazing story to tell the world or show the world in word and deed but it is mission impossible if we're not excited by this compassionate God who loves to intervene in our lives sometimes by invitation and sometimes out of pure compassion. The reason the crowd was excited

about Jesus was because they knew their scriptures and recognized the parallels with Elijah. If we don't know how to recognize the work of God in our lives we won't be blessed by it because we haven't noticed.