

“Go”  
The Reverend Michael L. Delk  
Hickory Neck Episcopal Church – Toano, Virginia  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 5 – 6 June 2010  
Luke 7:11-17

What do you do at a red light?

What do you do at a green light?

What do you do at a yellow light?

Three common signs: at the first two, we know what to do, but at the third, it depends upon your point of view. Speed up, or slow down: that is the question.

How we respond to signs in our lives can make all the difference. If we don't listen to our bodies, we can suffer an injury or come down with a cold, or much worse. If we don't listen to that whispering voice of wisdom, we can make bad choices. If we don't follow traffic lights, accidents might happen.

What other signs in life do we notice but ignore? What signs in life do we miss altogether?

Jesus performed a sign by bringing a young man back to life. We can hardly imagine the joy of his mother, a widow who had lost her only son. Jesus came along, just at the right time, and brought him back. The crowd that had gathered for a burial – a sad but familiar experience – was suddenly confronted with a new reality. Naturally, they were afraid, but joy rose above their fear, and the crowd rejoiced, aware that God was at work through Jesus.

What did this sign mean? For the mother, it meant everything; for the crowd, it gave confirmation of a new prophet in their midst. For us, we see the foreshadowing of another only son soon to be lost in death but raised to life again.

What more might there be for us, though, in this remarkable event? Could it be that, like the yellow light, we can look at this sign in more than just one way?

Maybe each of us ought to imagine ourselves as the young man on the stretcher, dead to the world. We sometimes feel like that, and even when we don't, we might still be . . . dead to the world. Ever get the sense that the world has passed you by? Ever worry that in the grander scheme of things, you don't matter? Read the news, go the ballot box, wake up late at night and know that you are one of more than six billion souls who inhabit this planet. It makes me feel tiny sometimes. How about you?

We search for power by snapping up stuff and venting our opinion and practicing our aim at the firing range, but despite our best efforts, we realize how precarious, how fragile our life is.

However, with Jesus, we feel better, and with good reason. All that frailty, unpredictability, all the risks of life are put in perspective. We can honor the truth of our weakness, because we know that weakness won the world for us on a cross. We can deal with our weakness, because Jesus is strong. We can even face death, knowing that our foe is conquered, that Jesus has triumphed, and that our life means something to the God who gives life eternal.

Never feel small, no matter what the world throws at you, no matter what those dark voices insinuate at the tough times, because Jesus notices you, just like he noticed the young man on his way to the grave. Jesus loves you, not because of anything you've done or will do, but because Jesus decided to love you, for better and worse and everywhere else in between.

There is no reason to fear, except to tremble the awesome love of God, a love that reveals a mystery beyond our comprehension, a mystery who knows us better than we know ourselves. We fear God because God grants a power we could never achieve on our own.

But it is all about us? Yes and no. God's love for each and every one of us is focused and enduring. But God's love is more than a one-on-one affair. Throughout history, God has intervened in the lives of individuals, so that God could gain access to the lives of communities. Consider Abraham, or Moses, or Joseph, or any of the prophets. Consider the apostles and St. Paul. Each individual was loved by God more than any of them could ever know, but each served as a vessel for God's love to reach others.

It's only natural. Love inspires us to share love. God reaches through individuals to make communities in His image, to make communities of people into the Body of Christ, communities greater than the sum of their parts. Hickory Neck is one of those communities.

Each of us, in one way or another, has been touched by the love of God. Otherwise, why would any of us be here? And each of us seeks to feel that touch of love again and again, and we receive that holy touch in many ways, including through our fellowship with each other.

True love, like what Jesus showed us in his life and on the cross and at the empty tomb, initiates a chain reaction. Where two or three are gathered together, not to mention two or three dozen or two or three hundred, love releases energy that yields light and warmth and power.

In this community where loving people gather to love and be loved, our natural impulse is to share with others, and not only with those here gathered, but with everyone we meet, even with people we may never meet.

Think, then, about how this sign of Jesus from so long ago, the raising of the young man from death to life, can be viewed from the perspective of a Christian community like ours. Here we are, a group of souls rescued from the spiritual graveyard, almost all of us through the primary intervention of a single person, a person who at times felt quite small in the world. But

look at what they did. Look at what you have done, and consider: what might Jesus do through us next?

Now this parish is far from near death. Nor are we in a coma, or merely sleeping. We aren't lazy either. But have we reached our full potential? Or put more accurately, have we opened up enough to allow the love of Jesus to flow through us unimpeded? Might Jesus be calling us to rise up to new life? And how shall we respond? With fear, yes, but also with rejoicing that takes us beyond our fears of success and failure, our fears of change and the unknown.

Joy takes us beyond fear because we know that whatever happens, Jesus loves each of us and that together, we have been empowered to act as agents of God's grace, a symbol of God's promise, and a channel of God's peace.

So often, we walk away from here, when we need to run, ready to seek out and share the love that saves us from boredom and from that nasty feeling of smallness and from the tendency to lose track of what's really important. If someone announced that everyone at worship next Sunday would receive a free two-week vacation to anywhere in the world they wanted, wouldn't you bring your friends? Wouldn't you insist that they come? Beg them, bribe them, cajole them, kidnap them – for their own good? If God wrote in lightning on the grass outside that everyone who showed up at a given place and time would receive complete healing of whatever ailed them, wouldn't you haul in every sick person you know, phone a friend across the country, place a blurb in the Last Word?

Of course, you might say, "Sure, but those are remarkable, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities," but isn't worship? Isn't meeting God and giving thanks and offering praise and receiving forgiveness and hearing the Word and eating the bread and drinking the wine – aren't

these more worthy than a trip or a cure? Worship offers both a both a journey and healing and much more.

The woman on her way to the tomb with her only son wasn't expecting a miracle. She felt small in a very large and intimidating world, and her son on the stretcher wasn't feeling anything. Are there people you know who don't feel anything? Are there people you suspect might be hurting? You can be like Jesus for that person, by letting Jesus work through you.

On the road of faith, we encounter red lights. Someday, they will turn green, but frequently we see yellow and wonder what to do. In the Kingdom of God, it means speed up, take a risk, have faith, and move on. Maybe not with your car, but with all the rest of you, go, go. Go. "This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding countryside." What's stopping you? Amen.