

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
NO ONE DIED IN HIS PRESENCE  
I Kings 17:17-24; Luke 7:11-17  
June 6, 2010  
10:00 A.M. SERVICE**

Dr. E. Stanley Jones was a great Methodist preacher. He could have been a bishop of the church, but he preferred being a missionary. I met Dr. Jones while in seminary at Wesley, in Washington, D.C. He told about a layman who was called upon to conduct a funeral service. Being an exact man, he wanted to do it right. So he turned to the Gospels to see how Jesus conducted a funeral. And he found that Jesus didn't conduct funerals at all. He only performed resurrections. Not one person died in his presence. He came upon those who were already dead and resurrected them and gave them new life.

There was a motion picture from the early 90s titled, *Awakenings*. *Awakenings* was based on the real life experiences of Dr. Oliver Sacks, a neurologist who sought to treat a mysterious illness that swept across Europe and the U. S. after World War I. This illness was sometimes referred to as “**sleeping sickness**,” but was more properly known as *encephalitis lethargica*. The main symptom of this sleeping sickness was that its victims fell into a comatose state that could last for months or even years. A few of these patients did awake from these comas, but when they did, their bodies would twist and tremor with symptoms very much like extreme cases of Parkinson's. Because the vast majority of the patients remained comatose, they were often warehoused, and generally forgotten, in long-term care clinics.

Oliver Sacks focused his attention on these sad and almost forgotten people. There was a new wonder drug called L-Dopa that had been shown to help victims of Parkinson's. Since some of those suffering from the “**sleeping sickness**” manifested symptoms similar to Parkinson's, Dr. Sacks began treating his patients

with the drug. When he did, the results were astounding. Many of them **“came back to life,”** so to speak. **“They regained the ability to move, speak, interact, and live a normal life. Each patient reacted to this new life differently. One patient became fearful and disoriented. Another patient developed an insatiable desire for new experiences. He wanted to read great books, study the detail in a flower, write his autobiography, dance all night. This particular patient announced, ‘I feel saved, resurrected, reborn.’ Sadly, the L-Dopa lost its potency over the next few months, and the patients slipped back into their vegetative states.”** (1)

There are three well-known instances in the Bible besides the resurrection of Jesus in which people who were dead were brought back to life. The most famous story is found in the gospel of John, chapter 11 where Jesus calls Lazarus back to life. The second is found in the scripture you heard read this morning. Jesus came upon a funeral procession of the only son of a poor widow who had died. She was distraught. But Jesus said to her **“Don’t cry.”** Then, to the dead son he commanded, **“Get up.”** The Bible tell us that the young man sat up and began to talk.

There is another well-known incident in the Old Testament. This one also involved a widow and her only son. But hhis time it was the prophet Elijah who was God’s instrument. The widow’s son was dead but he was given new life when Elijah offered a prayer to God.

I would suggest to you this morning that the business of faith is new life. The Apostle Paul understood that. He discusses at length the transformation that took place in his own life when he encountered Christ. Christ did not bring him back from the dead in a physical sense. The death that Paul experienced was the death of the old self--the self that had been self-righteously persecuting the tiny but fast growing Christian community. It was the old self of unhappiness, fear and rigid adherence to the law. The new life Paul experienced was spiritual.

Paul had died to the old self. Through Christ he received new life--abundant life. He got his life together. He knew who he was and what he was to do. He needed life--abundant life--the life only Christ can give.

Life is hopeless without Christ. Many people today live in a fool's paradise. They keep themselves sedated with alcohol and drugs and the accumulation of fancy toys rather than confront the meaninglessness of their lives. They buy self-help books religiously, but very few real changes actually take place in their life. Sometimes life becomes a pretense.

As summer begins, let us center ourselves in Christ. Perhaps we can find rest for our weary souls. Isn't it rest that many of us crave? And in some cases, rest is what we need. Far too many of us are simply tired. Perhaps some even more tired than we need to be. The loss of energy is a real drain for some people. Psychological and emotional conflict drains energy from us. We need rest not for our bodies, but for our souls.

There is no great energizer in the world than commitment to Jesus Christ. When life is centered in his purposes, life has a new freshness. Therefore determine what is most important in your lives. Make this your moment of transformation. I can assure you, with God you can bounce back from anything. So worry about nothing. I met with two members this week who are in hospice. At first, they were afraid. But by the end of the week all that fear went away. Worry is a very destructive force. Don't worry about anything, just have faith. Jesus never performed a funeral. He specialized in resurrections. He is life--abundant, never ending, joy to overflowing--life!

Be not dismayed! God will take care of you! As a God's servant, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.

1. Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 55-56.