My friend Christy is on the staff of the Duke University chapel, which means she preaches there, not every Sunday but regularly. This time, her time in the pulpit falls on this Sunday. Christy, her husband and their two small children visited us last weekend. She had already looked ahead to today's gospel lesson and she was not happy about it. Christy told me, “I don't want to preach about death and resurrection.” That seems like a strange thing for a preacher to say, but here's the thing. Christy's father died two months ago and she is still feeling raw and fragile. Her father, David, received a kidney transplant 15 years ago. The surgery was a great success and he had as normal a life as a transplant recipient can have until he landed in the hospital shortly before he died. Ironically, he did not die of kidney failure but of another, unrelated illness. Christy, her mother and her sister are still reeling from David's death, which was unexpected and sudden.

Christy's father was a pastor and she is now a seminary student. Christy knows about resurrection. She knows that Jesus died and was brought back from the dead. She knows that she lives under the promise of that resurrection, as did her father. Christy can probably recite the words said at her baptism and David's by heart, she has heard them so many times: “When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Christy knows these words, she believes them; her whole faith is centered around them.

But right now? Right now, Christy is still grappling with death. She is realizing that she can't just pick up the phone and call her dad, as she did countless times before. She knows now that she can't look forward to having her dad visit weekly, to take care of the children while Christy and her husband work. She is still coming to terms with the fact that her father won't be there for birthdays or holidays and that his death date will be another observance her family will have to face without him. I know what Christy is going through. I know that when someone we love dies, we must go through the pain of loss before resurrection can mean anything to us. I know that resurrection can be hard to talk about when you can't see it for yourself, can't know what it is like for someone you love. And I know how difficult it can be to speak of resurrection from the pulpit when your brain and your heart just aren't there yet.

Which makes the story of the widow whose son has died all the more remarkable. We don't know how long her son has been dead. It can't be too many days because he is just now being carried out of town to the place where he will be buried. It is likely that the woman has barely had time to grieve the death of her son when Jesus shows up and changes everything. All Jesus has to do is touch the bier, a kind of frame or stretcher that holds the man's body, and the widow's son is brought back to life. The dead man speaks and Jesus joins him and his mother. It's a great resurrection story, prompting people who are watching to praise Jesus and say things like, “A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has looked favorably upon his people!”

Because of where I am in my life, I wonder what the miracle felt like to those in the crowd who had loved ones who had died and not been brought back to life. And what about the other miracles: Jesus' healing of a man with an unclean spirit, Simon's mother-in-law, a leper, a man who was paralyzed and a man with a withered hand? Those in the crowed who were ill themselves or who had sick loved ones at home, how did they feel about that, knowing they would walk away from that place without the burden of their afflictions being lifted? Did Jesus' miracles seem random or haphazard to them?

If we look more closely at the story of the widow and her son, we find there is nothing random about this miracle. Luke tells us the woman in Nain was a widow and that the son who had died was her only son. In that culture, it meant that without a husband or a son to provide for her, the woman had no income, no way to pay for the roof over her head or the food she ate. This made Jesus' healing of her son not just an act of kindness or a foretaste of Jesus' own death and resurrection. It was those things, to be sure, but it was more. When Jesus healed the widow's son, he gave her new life; he gave her old life back to her. He gave her peace and safety, too.

Jesus' healing of the widow's son was an act of justice. Jesus saw injustice in the way the woman would be treated in the aftermath of her husband's and her son's deaths and he acted to protect the woman from those who would consider her somehow less of a person than they were, simply because her loved ones had died. With this miracle, Jesus offers us both opportunity and challenge: to bring his healing and his power to people who are suffering. We add to the list every time we turn on the news or run into someone at the grocery store. Men and women trapped in the hell of a deteriorating body simply because they caught a virus or were stung by an insect or inhaled a fiber of a dangerous substance in their workplace. Children being sold into slavery. Refugees fleeing their homelands, trying to find a safe place to live. People in our own country who cannot drink the water officials have told them is safe. Families that don't have enough food to feed their children in the summer. Women who fear for their lives because of violence inflicted upon them by spouses or partners or strangers. Those in prison who are surrounded by violence and bleak futures. People in substandard housing who feel the icy winds of winter inside their homes and then cannot pay their fuel bills.

Psalm 146 tells of a God who embraces those whom society shuns. The psalm talks about God executing justice for the oppressed and giving food to the hungry. This God sets the prisoners free and opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; this Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers and upholds the orphan and the widow. This God of the Hebrews and God's Son who embodies God's word in the flesh offers us chance after chance after chance to care for those who are not treated fairly in this world, the literal and the figurative orphans and widows of our day.

And we do that in some beautiful ways. This summer, we are providing food to children who get free and reduced meals at school. We have provided mosquito nets to fight disease in Africa and in Papua, New Guinea. We take food to the foodbank to feed our neighbors and we open our doors at Thanksgiving to do the same. We help unemployed people find jobs. Our monetary gifts help feed hungry people around the world and help pastors' children go to school. Always, we are searching, calculating, weighing our resources to figure out how best to use them in our community and in broader and broader circles around us. In these labors of love is resurrection. Jesus works his resurrection power through us and sends us to people who see only death in their lives, who are mired in despair, and have no hope for the future. So, whether we are ready or not, whether we completely understand what we are doing or are going in blind, Jesus shows us how resurrection works: by seeking out those who need new life desperately and offering it in the name of Christ.

Christy and I and maybe you might not be ready to fully appreciate the signs of resurrection around us, but they are there, waiting for us to welcome them into our lives. There is one thing I didn't tell you about Christy's father. When it was time for David to have a kidney transplant 15 years ago, he was building a house to retire in with his wife. All of David's family wanted to give him one of their kidneys, but none of them were a match and no one emerged from a donor list as a match either. The man who was building David's house wanted to get the tests done to see if he could be a donor. This man who David barely knew, who was not one of his family, *this* man was a match. David couldn't believe it; he had conflicting feelings about this almost-stranger who would literally be in his life forever. The builder insisted and so the surgery went on and both men recovered completely.

I know that this may not be the right time for Christy to be reminded of this miraculous story or to speak of it as the resurrection it was. I think that in time she will remember it as the mighty act of a loving God, who wished to heal his child from the injustice of disease. As I think of Christy and the darkness of her grief, I pray that the light of resurrection will become so real to her and to me – and maybe you – that we will give thanks for the rescue of our loved ones' broken bodies and their entry in an eternal home free from the horrors of the world's pain – in a word, resurrection.

Amen.