

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on June 6, 2010 (Proper 5, Year C)

“Rock Star Jesus.” That’s who we get this morning. Now, this is different from “Malibu Barbie” or GI Joe. But after the birth narrative – Mary, the manger, the Magi; after John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness; after the calling of the first disciples; but before the arrest, trial, and crucifixion we get “Rock Star Jesus.” For an all-too-brief period Jesus wanders through the countryside preaching and teaching and healing followed by ever-increasing crowds. He is a figure of action if not an action figure. And like it or not, Jesus has become a celebrity; he is all the rage.

By this time in Luke’s gospel, Jesus’ reputation was spreading like wildfire. In today’s world, we’d say that his ministry had gone viral. We hear that he entered this particular town accompanied not only by his disciples but also “a large crowd.” Some of these people had already seen him work his “magic;” others were hoping to catch a glimpse of one of his miracles – something they could tell their grandkids about. And to me, the whole scene sounds a bit like a moveable rock concert; the Woodstock of Ancient Palestine. Sometimes the crowds are so thick Jesus has to get into a boat for everyone to see and hear him; at others he needs to sneak away just to get a moment to himself; crowd control can consist of feeding everybody with five loaves and a couple of fish. He’s got an entourage of apostles and he even has groupies – probably known even back then as “Jesus freaks.” We don’t hear about any roadies in the Bible but someone had to set up a place for him to speak.

The problem with rock star crowds is that, except for the most die-hard fans, they’re fickle. They only hang around until the next hot act comes to town. They may cry out for an encore one moment and boo you off the stage the next. Or in this case, cry “Hosanna” when you’re popular and “Crucify him” when you’re not. But that’s a buzz kill so let’s stay with the rock star theme a little longer.

Today we hear two stories of miraculous healings – the prophet Elijah brings a young boy back to life and Jesus resurrects a widow’s only son. These stories are miraculous and inspiring and hopeful but they’re also tough because such things never seem to happen in our own lives. I, frankly, would have really liked it if Jesus, Elijah, *somebody* had raised my own father after he died of cancer at 52. And you can probably think of people *you* wish had been resurrected from the dead; loved ones you yearn to still have in your midst; friends or family members who were taken too soon. Imagine the additional memories that could have been made; imagine the experiences and joys that could have been shared. I know I do.

This isn’t to make you rue the seeming unfairness of it all; to stir up feelings of regret and anger and grief. This gospel story, along with the raising of Lazarus, does an important thing for us. It offers us a foretaste of our own resurrection to eternal life. This is Jesus’ promise to us and to all

believers: that we who are baptized in his death will be raised in his resurrection. That's pretty powerful stuff. It means that the line between life and death has been erased and that whether we live or die we are alive in Christ. These resurrection stories show that death is not the end and that is the good news of the Christian faith. You and I and those we have known and loved and lost in this mortal life remain in genuine relationship with Jesus Christ even at the point of death.

But it's also important to remember that the act of being raised transcends the physical. The reading from Galatians shows us just how dramatic this can be. Paul was a man with a violent reputation for persecuting Christians. If Jesus *drew* crowds, they fled from Paul. And yet even this man was not beyond being raised to new life in Jesus Christ. The possibilities of the divine are limitless.

So for us the question is what aspect of our own lives needs conversion and raising up? What cries out to be uprooted and overturned? What demands repentance and renewal? This isn't about wallowing in guilt and self pity. It's about allowing yourself to be opened up to the possibilities of transformation. Not by picking up a self-help manual but by offering yourself to Jesus and allowing him to raise you up to new life.

When Jesus first encounters the funeral procession bearing the body of the widow's son, Luke tells us that "the Lord" was moved with compassion. This is the very first time that Luke uses the word "Lord" in reference to Jesus. And that's pretty amazing because it tells us that Jesus is at his most "lordly" when he is showing compassion and mercy.

From everything we've ever heard or read about royalty that's not often at the top of the list. Yet this same compassion is reserved for you and me. Which is precisely why we can offer to God the parts of our lives of which we're not proud. Our Lord is first and foremost merciful, understanding, and compassionate. And this is one place where the "Rock Star Jesus" analogy doesn't fit – well, besides the sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll. Jesus is decidedly not an entitled bad boy. One who trashes hotel rooms and insists on a list of obscure dressing room demands. He doesn't lord his popularity over everyone else. Indeed his "lordship" is quite the opposite.

He may be "Jesus Christ Superstar" but he is accessible, compassionate, merciful, and loving. The crowds that gather don't fully understand this; they don't comprehend just who Jesus is. At this point they're enjoying the show. But in time, if they want to be those hard core fans that stick around, they – like us – will need to pick up their crosses and follow him.