

*A sermon delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost 3, June 9, 2013, dedicated to Tim Bailey, a champion runner and all the other people who run with him, to Kevin Jones and all the choirs of First Church, and always to the glory of God!*

## **“Keep it Simple”**

### ***I Kings 17:8-24; Luke 7:11-18***

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Tim Bailey has faced many challenges and hardships in his short life. Five years ago, Tim lost his father and his mother within a six month period. He has also lost other significant family members since then. He was a 12-year-old orphan when he moved in with his grandparents. As they raised Tim ever since, they tell him every day that he can accomplish anything he sets his mind to. Now as a junior at Westland High School, Tim has become one of Ohio’s top “runners.” Yesterday, as a 17-year-old “sprinter,” Tim Bailey finished first in the 100 meter dash; and second in the 400 meter and 800 meter runs at the Ohio High School Track and Field Championships at Jesse Owens Stadium.

**Tim participated in all three events without legs.** That’s right. Tim Bailey was born without useable legs. As he says, *“I feel them, but I cannot walk.”* Nevertheless, he can run. I call it “running” because that is what Tim calls it. When asked if he is rolling or wheeling, Tim answers, *“. . . I am running.”* He calls the other runners, *“Footed runners.”* When asked in an interview what he calls himself and others like him – disabled or handicapped –

Tim says, “*People. I call us ‘people.’*” He continues, “*When I look around I don’t see us being in wheelchairs. I see us as being regular members of society.*” Tim Bailey keeps things simple.

By the way, the “person” who beat Tim in the 400 and 800 was a 10<sup>th</sup> grader from Wooster named Casey Followay. Casey finished second to Tim in the 100. Thanks to the efforts of Lisa Followay, Casey’s mom, this was the first year these three events plus the Shot Put were included in the state track and field championships. I think Jesse Owens would have loved these guys!

What strikes me most about this clear and straightforward young man is his “can-do” attitude. For example, he loves working on cars. To do this, he pulls himself out of his wheelchair and climbs onto the engine. From there he can repair cars. He keeps it simple.

In both passages of scripture today, our prophets – Elijah and Jesus – become pastors and healers. They lead with actions over words. They keep it simple.

In I Kings 8, Elijah is faced with the starving widow of Zarephath and her son. She believes she is preparing her last meal on earth. But Elijah believes something else. Through Elijah’s simple act of faith – a miracle happens and two starving people are fed.

Soon, the woman’s son becomes sick and dies. She believes this has happened because of her sin. Elijah ignores her comments about her own sins and simply sets to work on this deceased son. Through the power of God, the prophet raises the child from the dead – a foretaste of the Christ who is to come. If Elijah’s credentials as a prophet were in question before, they are no longer. The non-believing widow announces he is a man of God and his words are trustworthy and true. There it is. Elijah’s prophecy is simple, trustworthy and true.

In Luke 7, Jesus shows compassion by raising the dead son of the widow of Nain. The Greek word used to describe Jesus’ compassion is *Splagchnizomai* which means “*a heart of love*” or “*the*

*turning of the womb.*” Compassion and womb come from the same root. *Splagchnizomai* is the same word used to describe the intense feelings the Samaritan had for the man he found beaten on the road in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33). It is the same word used when the father welcomed his lost son home in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20). So compassion is the “Womb Love.”

Compassion’s source for love comes from deep inside of us. Like a mother’s love, it is deep, simple, embracing and it leads to clear acts of love – a son raised from the dead, a beaten man restored to full life, a father embracing his son’s return from being all but dead in his self-destruction. The actions of compassion are always life-giving but they often take us into risky places of death and defilement.

Like Tim Bailey, Elijah and Jesus keep it simple. In fact they are so clear and simple, we could summarize their prophetic and compassionate acts of love in one word – “YES.” They are “Yes” people.

That’s right. If we were asked to summarize the Gospel in one word, that word would be “Yes.” Every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” God always gets to “Yes.”

In his “Stillspeaking Devotional,” Martin Copenhaver speaks to this. He writes:

*During his lifetime, the human family used every way we knew to say "No" to Jesus. We rejected him, betrayed him, denied him and killed him. And yet, in the resurrection, God would not take our "No" for an answer. Before and after and under our definite "No" is God's triumphant "Yes."*

Or as poet Wallace Stevens wrote,

*After the final no there comes a yes, and on that yes the future world depends." So, God gets the last word. And that last word is "Yes." (In the June 9, 2013, Stillspeaking Devotional online).*

“Yes” is trustworthy, true, faithful and sure. It is compelling and clear. Yes is prophetic and honest. “Yes” is the reason for our being people of faith. While other churches and other faith traditions may focus on “no,” we believe our still speaking God is calling us to live, speak, and act as “yes” people.

Since today is our last Sunday with our amazing choir before their summer break, I close with the words of my favorite anthem – sung a few weeks ago on Pentecost Sunday. The anthem is written from the poem of e.e. cummings, “i thank you God for most this amazing day.”

I thank you God for most this amazing day  
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky;  
and for everything  
which is natural  
which is infinite which is yes.  
(e.e. cummings)

May our God of “yes,” in whose complexity the universe and each one of us was created from the womb of love, may this God keep bringing you to “yes” in your life of faith and service to others. Amen.

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