

Trinity XVI, 2006
Text: St. Luke 7:11-17
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The widow at Nain had suffered grief upon grief. Her husband had been taken from her, and now her only child was cold and dead, wrapped up in linen and being carried off to a tomb. Though she was surrounded by a crowd, she was alone; desperately alone. Though her friends and family were there to comfort her now – the weeks and months would pass and they would fade out of her life. They always mean to remember – but the problem is that death and tragedy are so ordinary. This world is full of them. Another school shooting calls back to our minds the pain and grief we felt on that April when Columbine was attacked – but which of us recalled it a week a month or a year ago? Only those who lost loved ones actually carry its memory in their hearts each day. The rest of us have forgotten in a way they never can. And who can blame us? For each has enough tragedies to recall and remember, enough heartaches to crowd out the pain that others might feel.

And so the widow at Nain trails behind her only-begotten son's funeral

procession, weeping and alone. Alone in her grief – for while each member of the procession for the moment shares the grief they will move on, back to their own griefs. Such is the way of the world.

This is a scene of despair, a scene of death without hope. And it is not foreign to you. You have felt the same way, cried the same tears, offered to God the same trade: take me instead, Lord. You have been tempted to call God a liar and a cheat. Despair has knocked on your door and tempted you to give up on it all – for it isn't worth it in the end anyway. Repent.

Turn away from despair and look to see another procession meeting this one. At the head of this procession is another Only Begotten Son – and he leads not a procession of death but of Life. For here we see Jesus encounter death face to face. Who will win? Who has the last word?

First, He walks up to the widow and tells her “Do not weep.” How many times had she heard that before? From others those words are hollow and pointless. But not when they come from Jesus. For Jesus is the one who will wipe every tear from our eyes. And then he reaches out and touches the funeral bier – Life touches Death – and who will win? In our experience death always does: whether germs, or bullets, or speeding cars, or angry fists – when the instruments of death touch life, life gives way to death. But not so with Jesus. He is here to undo our broken world, to undo death itself.

And so when Jesus, who is the Life, touches death, death must give way.

“Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the son is restored to his mother alive again.

And if you are tempted now to say: “Well good for her – I’m glad that widow on that day way back when got her son back – but what about me and my loss?” you are not alone and not unreasonable. Just as we cannot absorb the griefs of others, neither can their joys soak up our sorrows.

But Jesus raises this young man, not just out of pity for his mother – but as a sign of his pity for you and whole world. Just as Jesus was moved by the sorrow that the sinful brokenness of the world had brought to this widow, so he is moved to pity you. He knows and feels your griefs even more deeply than you know and feel them. He is God – and so while others forget and abandon and fade away – he never does. He always knows your sorrows, for he bore them for you on the cross. For while no mere man may die or feel sorrow for another – Jesus is no mere man, but man and God in one person. And so upon that cross he did soak up your miseries and heartaches, your sorrows and griefs. He bore the full weight of the sin of the world: the sickness and disease, the violence and the pain, the injustice and the unfairness, and all this brought him, who is Life, down to death, even death on a cross.

But again, the Lord who is Life touches death and death must give way. He died on that cross – but in that death he destroyed the power of death forever and

so rose again on the third day.

Dear Christians this is our hope in the face of all sorrows. No matter your grief or heartache, no matter your sorrow in this world, look to Jesus for comfort and healing. It is a long and dark road to walk in this valley of sorrow – but Jesus' death and resurrection will bring joy in the morning of the resurrection of all flesh. He has promised it. He will return to raise the dead, not just for some years of earthly life as he did for this son of a widow – but for all eternity. The tears will be wiped away from your eyes. Your sorrow will be turned into joy. He has promised it. He has purchased it with his blood.

So cast your cares on him and know that you have nothing to fear – know that all will be set right. In the meantime, trust him, call out to him in prayer, heed his Word of comfort and gladness, receive his Sacrament for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus lives and death must die. Though weeping last through the night, joy will come on the morrow. His mercy endureth forever. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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