

TRINITY XVI – SEPTEMBER 19, 2021 – LUKE 7:11-17

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

“Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry.’ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. ‘A great prophet has appeared among us,’ they said. ‘God has come to help his people.’ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.” Thus far our text.

Let’s see if we can follow this narrative for a minute. Jesus was entering the village of Nain as He was traveling around the countryside, preaching and teaching the Word of God, and properly interpreting the Old Testament prophecies as being fulfilled in Himself. All of a sudden, His travel was interrupted by a funeral procession. We all have seen funeral corteges today, haven’t we? People are supposed to pull to the side of the road, and make way for the mourners, out of respect for the loss that they have recently suffered. The members of the procession turn on the headlights of their cars, and proceed slowly, also out of respect for the recently departed – we want to make it clear

that we are taking time out of our busy schedules to recognize that we, too, are drawing every day closer to death, and that we, too, are in desperate need of the deliverance of God from this sinful world to have any hope whatsoever.

In Jesus' case, He didn't just move out of the way and let the group carrying the body pass. He didn't just reverently step out of the path that they were taking, and then get on with His business of heading to the Synagogue to preach. No! He became intimately involved with the situation. He went up to the mother, and spoke kindly to her, with empathy for her situation. This was quite an odd thing for Jesus to do. Not only was this woman a widow, which relegated her to one of the lowest levels in society, since she had no visible source of income, but also her son had died, leaving her completely destitute and hopeless for the future. Similarly to other situations in the Scriptures, though, Jesus made it His business to become involved in the lives of those who were downtrodden, who were minimized, who were less than respected in society. He decided to not only speak kindly to the widow who had lost her son, but He also set about to do such a miracle that it would be talked about even today, over 2000 years later. Let's explore this morning some of the details about this activity of Jesus, that would have lasting effects upon His disciples, and even us today, and what this means for us in our daily lives as well.

Most of you have probably been at the side of a casket at a funeral, and not known what to say or do, haven't you? It's hard to think of the right words to say to comfort the bereaved, especially if they are having a difficult time dealing with the death of their loved one, or if the death was sudden and/or unexpected. It doesn't come easily to us – most of us would rather avoid the situation altogether, and not be in such an

uncomfortable position at all. We often come up with some very trite statement, such as, “He’s in a better place now,” or, “I’m very sorry for your loss.” These words don’t do a thing to ease the suffering and the mourning of the family left behind, now do they? I as the pastor often am in the situation where I have the privilege to bring the Word of God to such a situation, and speak the comforting words of Scripture to the family that God loves His children, and has redeemed them with His blood and merits. While this is very true, and is the right thing to do, sometimes it rings a little bit hollow. What we’d really like to say is that there is something that we can concretely DO about the situation.

But, Jesus didn’t say any of the former things – rather, He says to the widow, “Don’t cry.” This runs right in the face of how we are trained to handle grief situations. After all, we are told that there are many different ways in which people cope with grief – crying, shutting down emotionally, throwing themselves into their work or their remaining family. We aren’t to dictate how they are to mourn, because this is different with each individual person. But, Jesus doesn’t respond in the way that we think He should. He tells the widow not to cry. Ordinarily, we would think that this was just an empty platitude to get the woman to calm down, or to get her thinking about something else rather than her grief. But, in Jesus’ case, He tells her this because He has something marvelous and wonderful in store for her.

Surprisingly, Jesus’ unexpected words don’t end there. He then turns to the son, in the casket, and says, “Young man, I say to you, get up.” If someone did this today at a funeral visitation or service, we might think that they were a little bit crazy, or at least not in touch with reality. We all know that dead people don’t sit up; they are DEAD! I can imagine that the widow’s extended family was about to the point of a typical southern

family at this point, and about to rush up to the casket and remove this Jesus, who was just making things worse for their sister and cousin and close relative. Jesus uses these strange words, and these strange reactions, to accomplish His goal of causing things that are out of the ordinary to happen. But, the ultimate unexpected event happens – the dead man rises from the dead, and is restored to his mother. Jesus worked a miracle in their midst; He caused life to spring from death. Where there was nothing living a minute before, He spoke His Word, and things changed. Rather than just being tongue-tied and speechless at the sight of a horrible tragedy, Jesus worked a miracle, and accomplished what no other words could do – He changed the situation into a positive one, instead of a negative one.

But, we shouldn't be surprised at this – God specializes in doing the unexpected. Take our Old Testament reading for this morning – the widow at Zarephath, and her son who had just died. Elijah was given the power from God to accomplish much the same thing, albeit with much less fanfare and a smaller crowd, in the days long before Jesus' earthly ministry. This widow, also, was left without visible means of support, without anyone to work and bring money into the house, after her son died, and her husband's passing before this. But, God worked through Elijah, in the same way that Jesus came down from heaven, and healed the widows of the reason for their sorrows.

But, there's more going on here than we might think at first. God specializes in the unexpected – this isn't just about widows having their sons restored to them. God isn't limited by our understanding of the situation to act on our behalf; rather, His power is unbridled, and His love is everlasting. He didn't need to explain Himself to the onlookers, who were wondering just what He was going to do to rectify the situation;

rather, He acted first, and answered questions later. We wouldn't expect that God would care about us in our sinful condition, and do everything that there was to be done to cause our salvation to come about, but He did. We are sinful and unclean creatures, not worthy of consideration or notice in the grand scheme of God's creation. But, He cared enough for us to change things totally around, and restore us to the hope of heaven, and being with Himself forever there, that He did everything for our salvation.

In fact, God raised us from the dead, and the result is the same as the sons of the widows in our narratives – we arise and live and move and have our being, totally because of the unmerited favor of God. Or, to put it another way, we and the widows' sons have the hope of being raised from the dead because the Savior of the world, Jesus, was raised from the dead on the Third Day. Quite simply, the death and resurrection of Christ causes us to have the hope of rising to eternal life when our earthly lives are over.

Further, we were buried in the waters of Holy Baptism, and arise to new life by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, whereby He implants saving faith within us, and crucifies our sinful nature, by the daily, progressive process which we call Sanctification. No longer are we eternally dead, but we are forever alive because of the works of Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. God worked a miracle in our hearts, and restored us to our families, and “gave us a new lease on life,” so to speak, even though we were headed down the road to the cemetery in a coffin because of our sinfulness. It's hard to comprehend, but without Christ's death and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit's working in our hearts and souls, we'd might as well jump into a coffin right now, and pull the lid shut, because we are marching ever closer to our death every day. But, because of God's interjection of His grace and mercy into our formerly hopeless situation, we have new

life, and are raised from the certainty of eternal death to the blessed hope of eternal life. In the same way that Jesus touched the coffin, and caused the son of the widow to rise from the dead, He also touches us with the waters of Holy Baptism, and causes us to rise to new life in heaven, and the hope of being in His eternal presence in heaven forever there.

Our text ends with the statement from the crowds that “God has come to help His people.” Jesus’ goal when He raised the son of the widow at Nain from the dead had been accomplished, just as every word from the mouth of God finds its complete fulfillment because it is more living and active than we can even fathom. We can gain from this narrative that God dwells among His children, and specializes in working with those who are seen by us as being beyond hope, and on the outskirts of society. He doesn’t look at our worthiness to receive His gifts, nor does He keep track of how outrageous His working will seem to the people of this world. Rather, He does what He has set out to do, and it is marvelous and earth-shattering in its scope.

He isn’t satisfied with the *status quo*. Instead, He sets out to change it, and does so by His almighty power and His all-surpassing love. Unlike us sinful men, who are tongue-tied and made mute in the face of sorrow and grief, He has all the right words to say and the actions to do. He returned the son to his grieving mother, out of His love and His mercy. He raises us from the dead because He cares for us, and does everything that is necessary to save us from our sins, and draw us to Himself in heaven. Thanks be to God for His miraculous work among us sinful men, and for His all-surpassing love and care. He loves us so much that He continues to astonish us with His compassion and His provision, and for taking hopeless situations and making them hopeful once again.

Because He is risen from the dead, He was able to raise widows' sons from the dead, and will raise us when His time comes to life eternal in heaven. He has done it all for our salvation. Amen.

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

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.