

Sermon for June 5, 2016 - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 7:11–17 (NIV84)

Theme: "Don't Cry"

- 1) *Jesus' heart goes out to you.*
- 2) *He raises the dead.*

<sup>11</sup> *Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.* <sup>12</sup> *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.* <sup>13</sup> *When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."* <sup>14</sup> *Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"* <sup>15</sup> *The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.* <sup>16</sup> *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."* <sup>17</sup> *This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.*

It will happen at some point in your life: someone you love dearly will die. At such a time, many confused thoughts will go through your head. You may wonder: "Why did the LORD take him away from me? Doesn't He care? Doesn't God see how much I need him? Who will take care of me now? I feel so lost, overwhelmed and alone."

Facing the death of a loved one is probably one of the hardest things we have to go through in life. During such a time God feels so far away. The cold chill of death prevents us from feeling the warmth of his love. And so, even if we are able to keep our eyes dry, our souls weep.

At times like this it is good to remember the comfort the LORD offers us in this morning's sermon text - which we will consider, under the theme: "**Don't Cry**" 1) *Jesus' heart goes out to you.* 2) *He raises the dead.*

Part One: Jesus' heart goes out to you.

Our sermon text takes place shortly after the events discussed in last week's sermon, when a centurion in Capernaum sent representatives to Jesus to ask him to heal his servant by the power of his Word. Jesus granted that request, thereby revealing himself as the Messiah.

We read: *Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.*

Why was there such a large crowd following Jesus? I am sure that many, like his disciples, followed to hear him teach. Others, however, probably followed him in the hopes of seeing some sort of miracle. Little did they realize how great a miracle Jesus would perform.

Nain, Jesus intended destination, was located in the southern part of Galilee - bordering on Samaria. It was a small walled city with one gate. We are not told why Jesus wanted to go to Nain. Was it to preach there? Probably. But I don't think it is wrong to imagine that Jesus, with his divine foreknowledge, already knew the plight of the widow and went there to help her - all to the glory of his name.

<sup>12</sup> *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.*

Just picture the scene: from the north, Jesus approached the city with a large crowd of people-happy and eager to hear him preach. From the south came a large funeral procession of people crying and wailing as they walked. And this was no ordinary funeral either. A woman, who already lost her husband, had to now deal with the death of her one and only son. And not only did she love him dearly, but he was her only family. Without him, she had no financial support. She pretty much lost everything when he died.

And now, in the narrow gate of Nain, joy and sadness, hope and despair, and life and death meet. The living Son of God the Father looks on the dead son of a human mother. And, *when the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.*

The word translated in our text as “his heart went out to her” could be more literally translated: “his gut moved.”

Have you ever felt such compassion and pity for a person that your stomach literally hurt for them? This is how Jesus - the almighty LORD - felt for this woman. He was not indifferent to her sorrow.

But why? She doesn't seem to have been a relative. The Bible doesn't name her. I am sure that there were many other widows throughout Judea who lost sons. Why does Jesus single her out?

The answer? Grace. Jesus, being God in human flesh, loves the widow for no other reason than that He simply chose to love her. She may be nameless to us, but not to God. He knows the name of every person on this earth. Every one of them is his lost creation whom he knows more intimately than we know ourselves. He knows our sins, sorrow and the fact that we deserve nothing from him, and yet his heart goes out to us individually - just as it went out to this widow. The LORD takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. He says so much in his Word.<sup>1</sup> The whole reason he came into this world is to pay for our sins so that, through faith, we might be rescued from the threat of eternal death in hell.

Jesus loved this widow. His heart went out to her in her sorrow. Just as a mother tries to gently hush an upset toddler who has just been hurt, so Jesus says to the woman: “Don't cry.” - tenderly inviting her to trust in him and his love. He was about to do something no one else could do: give her genuine comfort and joy.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever we face the death of a loved one, remember that the same Jesus whose heart went out to the widow of Nain, goes out to us as well. Even though we

don't see him, he is nevertheless present. With his Gospel promises He picks us up in his arms and says: "Hush, my child. I know you hurt. I feel your pain. Hush my child, I understand why you are sad, but you don't have to grieve like those who have no hope. Trust in me. I will make everything better because I am your Savior from sin. I am your God. I have power to raise the dead. Hush my child and don't cry. "

Part Two: He raises the dead.

I wonder what the widow's reaction was when she first saw Jesus. Did she stop crying at his word - looking to receive whatever comfort he would offer? I can imagine her doing that - even if she didn't know who he was.

What Jesus does next is a remarkable demonstration of love. *Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still.*

Jewish law was clear - touch a corpse or anything it is touching and you become ceremonially unclean. No rabbi or priest would think about touching a coffin like Jesus did - especially when you consider that Jewish coffins were really open biers with no cover or sides on them. At yet, Jesus willingly touches it - ready to make himself unclean in order to help the widow.

This is not the only time Jesus made himself unclean to help someone. He did it for us as well. Just think: Jesus, the sinless Son of God, took all our sins upon himself in order to rescue us from the eternal death that threatened our souls. Our sins made him totally unclean, and as such He suffered God's most severe wrath and punishment on the cross. He did this willingly - knowing what would happen to Him. He did this to give us life.

After Jesus touched the dead son's coffin, He revealed his power for all to see. *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.*

In last week's Gospel reading, we heard the centurion confess: *"Say the word, and my servant will be healed."* Here we see Jesus demonstrating just how powerful his Word is. Just like Elijah in our Old Testament lesson, Jesus raised a widow's son and gave him back to his mother. But unlike Elijah, Jesus did not ask God the Father to raise the dead. He did it all on his own authority. He said, *"Young man, I say to you, get up!" and the dead man sat up and began to talk.*

This is why, when the people saw the miracle, *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."*

I don't know whether or not the people understood exactly what they were saying. Jesus is not just "a" great prophet; He is "the" great prophet the LORD promised Moses when Israel was about to cross into Canaan.<sup>ii</sup> Jesus is the promised Messiah. And the LORD did not simply come to help his people through Jesus. The LORD has come to help his people as Jesus. Jesus is the LORD. He is Immanuel: God with us.

And, as our Immanuel, Jesus has real power over death. The resurrection of the widow's son is not some parlor trick or made up story. It was performed in the open before two large crowds of witnesses. This is why *this news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.*

As I mentioned before, the account of Jesus raising the dead widow's son gives us awesome comfort as we face the death of our loved ones. How so? First of all it shows that, even though we may feel otherwise, God is not distant. He is close by and cares when we hurt.

Secondly, this account shows us the power Jesus has over death. What Jesus did for the widow's dead Son he will do for all at the end of time. St. Paul once wrote: *"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."*<sup>iii</sup>

And so, my brothers and sisters in Christ, when you face the death of a loved one and are tempted to cry out in anger: "Why did you take him from me, LORD? Don't you care? Don't you see how helpless I am without him?" remember this account. The LORD does see. He knows. He cares. Through the Gospel, He takes you in his arms and says: "Hush, my child: don't cry. Remember what I did for the widow of Nain? I will do the same for you too. Know that I am here. I will take care of you, because I am your Savior and you God. Trust in me and don't cry. I feel for you. Put your hope in me, for I will raise the dead on the last day." Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> cf. Ezekiel 18:32

<sup>ii</sup> cf. Deuteronomy 18:15-19

<sup>iii</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NIV84)