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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 4C)

June 5, 2016

Text: Luke 7:11–17

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

In Luke 7:1–10, the gospel from last Sunday, Jesus heals the beloved servant of a Roman centurion only by the power of His (Jesus') word. The centurion told Jesus not to worry about coming to the house for the centurion didn't believe himself worthy of such an honor. Just speak the word Jesus, even from a distance, and my servant will be healed. Jesus marvels at the man's faith. And the servant is healed, solely and completely by the power of Jesus' word.

But today's situation is much more serious. Jesus faces death head-on. And Jesus wins! According to vs. 11, soon after the healing of the centurion's servant, Jesus and His disciples travel south to the town of Nain. It's less than 10 miles to the southeast of Nazareth. Jesus most likely knew the area quite well, having grown up in Nazareth.

Upon approaching the city gate, Jesus encounters a funeral procession (vs. 12). There's no chance of speaking of word of healing. It's too late. The young man is dead. And this isn't the first time the young man's mother has heard those stinging words of death. We learn in vs. 12 that she is a widow. She's lost her husband and now her son.

This incident reminds us of how unnatural and how wrong things are in this world. It's bad enough that a wife must be parted from her husband. Two lives, intertwined in fellowship and family, get ripped apart most unnaturally, most cruelly. But, we all know it's inevitable. The normal experience in this world is that sooner or later, a bride will become a widow, or a groom will become a widower. That may be the normal pattern of things but we must never concede ground and say this it is the natural order of things. It is not natural! Death is a dreadful foe with whom we can give no quarter, no compromise. It must be utterly defeated.

What we are less prepared to deal with, however, are children dying before their parents. Yes, it happens. But it's never expected. And when the young die, the grief and anguish are all the more potent. Luke subtly highlights this when he writes, "and a

considerable crowd from the town was with her” (vs. 12). Funerals for the elderly have grief and sorrow, make no mistake about that. But when the young die, there is bitterness, outrage, and prolonged shock.

The unnamed woman of Luke 7 has now endured both: the death of the old, her husband, and the young, her son. And so it seems, death is the master.

Jesus sees the situation and is moved with compassion (vs. 13). He feels her sorrow down to the depths of His soul. The Lord’s compassion moves Jesus to do the unthinkable, not only in His day, but our own. He stops the funeral procession! Today, the police and/or sheriff deputies block on-coming traffic so that funeral procession can proceed unhindered. It’s a sign of courtesy and respect for those mourning the loss of loved ones. Jesus interrupts the procession. All the expected norms of conduct must simply give place to the Lord of creation.

Upon finding the grieving mother, Jesus looks at her and says “Do not weep” (vs. 13). Only Jesus gets to say these words. I don’t recommend that you say them to family and friends mourning the death of loved ones. No matter how well meaning you may be, just don’t say them. Jesus’ strange behavior continues. Without permission, Jesus approaches the bier. He touches it! Eyes must have widened to the size of saucers. Touching the dead in Israel made you ceremonially unclean. Typically, the only ones who touched the dead were the closest of family members. But Jesus isn’t afraid of death or the ceremonial law. He the Law’s Lord. They must bow to Him!

Jesus’ strange behavior continues for He speaks to the dead. Not like loved ones so often do at the death of family and friends. Jesus doesn’t speak to the young man as if to say His final goodbyes. It’s quite the opposite. He speaks to the man as if he could hear and obey, as if he’s alive. “Young man, I say to you, arise” (vs. 14). It almost sounds like a parent telling a child to wake up so that he can get ready for school. Amazingly, the man hears! He obeys! He rises from the bier for he is in fact alive. There can be no mistake about this miracle. Jesus has raised the dead back to life!!!

There’s one huge difference between the miracle here at Nain and the healing of the centurion’s servant in Capernaum. The centurion’s faith in Jesus’ word was highlighted. “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (Luke 7:9) said Jesus about the centurion. Our faith and trust in Christ’s word are to be equally as confident. Just speak the Word, Jesus. And it shall be done. Amen.

But in Nain, Jesus' power and authority over death regardless of faith is what is highlighted. Did the mother have faith in Jesus? Nothing is said, one way or the other. The disciples are there but Luke doesn't indicate they said anything to Jesus. The Lord Jesus acts on His own authority according to His own prerogatives regardless of the faith of the individuals involved. And that's great news for us too! Jesus acts on our behalf for our good when our faith is strong, when it's weak, when it's non-existent. Thanks be to God for His love and grace.

Jesus raises the dead man at Nain to demonstrate to us that He is the Lord of life. He has the last, authoritative word in this and every situation. And the Christian gospel is that in the combat between Jesus and Death, Jesus wins. Life wins. Loved ones are returned back to their families. Hope and dignity are restored. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Such is the triumphant resurrection song of I Corinthians 15:55–57; that's our song of victory.

The people of Nain declared that "a great prophet has arisen among us" and "God has visited his people" (vs. 16). They confessed more than they knew. God in Christ has visited His people. That divine visitation, which we celebrate here every Sunday, was a visitation of a conquering King winning for Himself an eternal kingdom that is known and characterized by life and victory and hope unto eternal glory. That victory was achieved in the most unlikely of ways: the conquering King dies for the sake of friend and foe alike. His holy blood pays the atonement price for those who hail Him Lord of all as well as for those who hate Him most of all.

But then three days later, and that's the decisive event that changes everything, on Easter morning, the conquering King rises from the dead thus break the bonds of Death and the grave forever. As great as the miracle was at Nain in raising the widow's son from the dead, it was but a preview of the greatest miracle of all: the Lord of glory stepping into our doom, and blowing it apart by rising from the dead, never to die again. In Revelation 1, the exalted Lord Jesus declares to you and me and all creation "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17–18).

And therein lies our greatest confidence and hope. As sure and certain as Jesus raised the young man at Nain, as sure and certain as the Lord Himself died and rose again on

the third day, so He will raise you and all His people on the great day of His second coming. And you shall be returned to the fullness of God's design and intention from the very beginning: to enjoy life in body and soul without the specter of death ever appearing again. And so we shall rise to live before God and each other in righteousness and joy into the ages of ages.

Until Jesus comes again on the Last Day, all people must face their own mortality. But we Christians approach it with the Lord's cross and resurrection standing before and over us and in us. What we witnessed earlier today, **in Woodrow's baptism**, was Christ's cross and resurrection being placed upon a redeemed child of God. Romans 6 teaches us that when we are baptized, we are baptized into the Lord's death and His resurrection so that we can walk in the newness of Christ's undying life.

Dear saints of God, right now, you possess the most powerful gift in this universe: the resurrection life of Jesus which can never be defeated, diminished, or extinguished. Unless the Lord comes again in our life time, our fleshly bodies will die. But they will be raised again even as Jesus' fleshly body was raised on the third day. On that great day, Jesus will say again, as He did to the widow's son at Nain, "I say to you all, arise." And so we shall be gathered together with all of God's people and rejoice in our resurrection victory for all eternity. This is what we celebrate today, **in Woodrow's baptism**. This is what we celebrate everyday of our Christian lives. We are sons and daughters of the Lord Jesus; we are sons and daughters of resurrection life, now and into the ages of ages.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.