

June 5, 2016
Luke 7:11-17

Proper 5C
Life out of Death

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm sure you've all been there before, maybe you've followed the casket out of the sanctuary down the steps into the hearse or you've followed the casket out of the sanctuary down the steps to the church cemetery. I'm sure you've all been the place of the grievers, those who mourn the death of a loved one, whether that be a husband or wife, a parent, a grandparent, a child, a friend. Most if not all of you has stood by a coffin as you took greetings from friends and extended family.

Funeral processions are never easy. Even for myself, funerals are not easy. I get to know people, I provide them with Word and Sacrament. Each death stings. And it should! Yet, each death brings people together, you experience compassion from people that you didn't think even cared that you walked this earth.

Let me take you to our text. Jesus went to a City called Nain. His disciples and even a great crowd were following Him. I don't know how big Nain was at the time, but Jesus came to the gate of the city and there was a considerable crowd from the city with a grieving mother, whose son was laid out on a bier. A bier is a flat wooden stretcher piece of equipment to carry the dead in open air. It's different then our present day caskets. Jesus goes to them, He says the widow and now the childless mother and has compassion on her. This widow's only-begotten child was now dead...but yet Jesus has compassion on her.

Jesus has compassion on a widow who most people would over look. You see, this woman now has no security amidst the Israelite society. Her son and husband are now both dead. She's broken and frankly she's hopeless and helpless.

Broken, hopeless, and helpless that's what you and I are. You could very well be in the same position as the Widow of Nain...with no security amidst...amidst...the society...rather the Kingdom of God.

All of you bring things to church that weigh you down. You bring casket upon casket full of down and depressing things to church. Look into your life and you'll see that trials and troubles that weigh you down. It's not just the death of loved ones, as the Widow is experiencing in our text. The widow is also facing the fact that there is no security for her. You, too, experience that. You running on your own in this world has no security. The devil can pounce at any and every moment. He takes those times that you are physically, emotionally, spiritually broken, hopeless, and helpless and tries to completely break you, take away any sense of hope or help that you have.

You've had enough of the chemo you are feeling so worn out. You've had argument after argument with your child. You've lost many friends or family members to death in recent memory. Your fighting with your spouse. You still grieve over the death of your spouse. You've been harmed by the church. Maybe a fellow member has said something behind your back. Maybe I've said something to you or a previous pastor has done something to cause you to lose trust in the church or rather the Office of the Holy Ministry. The fights and failed relationship, the disease and death, the sin and sorrow all have you broken, hopeless and helpless that you are falling into despair over your faith. You are asking where does my security come from, so you chase after other worldly things...maybe it's alcohol, maybe it's pornography...maybe it's as simple as working overtime. The devil uses these things to ultimately get you to say, "God, I don't need you." The devil uses these things to ultimately get you to say, "Is there really a God at all? He's not even helping me." You know where you go to find your security...and it can and will break you even more, leave you without any hope, and leave you completely and utterly helpless and all alone.

Alone, that's what the widow would have been...for Everyone else would likely ignore her, but Jesus...he does not!

Rather Jesus shows that He has great compassion. This attribute of Jesus is seen when He heals and releases from bondage. This is His programmatic mission as we hear in Luke 4: ¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*¹ Jesus' ministry is heal and release. It's to bring you hope, help, and restoration.

In today's text, we see the testimony of God working His salvation. We see Jesus touching the bier, the casket, and Jesus risks becoming ritually unclean. You see in that day and age, touching the dead makes you ritually unclean. Something different happens here, Jesus is at the funeral procession and instead of becoming defiled. Jesus cleanses and heals. Jesus changes the funeral procession into a celebration of life. Jesus brings purity to the unclean situation.

Indeed, this is exactly what He has come to do. He did it for the Widow of Nain, He did it for the demon possessed man in Luke 4, He did it for the leper in Luke 5, He did it for the Centurion's Servant who we heard of last week. He even brings purity by forgiving the sins of the Paralytic later in Luke 5. Now...Jesus brings purity to death.

You see the power of holiness and life is in HIM! If Jesus can heal the sick and raise the dead, He can forgive your sins, because He has the power of holiness in Him. HE has the power to bring you full restoration and healing and hope and life.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Lk 4:18–19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

As Jesus shows that He Himself the One who was to come, He also shows Himself that He is indeed the Messianic Prophet. This resurrection recalls the resurrection of the widow's son by Elijah. This resurrection also foreshadows two more...the resurrection of Jairus' daughter in Luke 8 and also HIS own resurrection.

This is the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus and "we see Jesus' power over death, which he will proclaim once and for all in his own resurrection."

As the crowds who are in the funeral procession go from weeping to glorifying God, the widow and mother of her now deceased only begotten son goes from weeping to joy. As the crowds experience this, they don't quite understand Jesus is the same prophet that Isaiah spoke about being the one who would suffer and die.

They thought that Jesus was a prophet only as a teacher and miracle worker, one that came only to alleviate human suffering...and oftentimes so do we, but that isn't the God that we have. We beg and we plead for God to take away the suffering. We beg and we plead for God to help us when times are. Yet the crowds acclaim Jesus as the great prophet and celebrate God's visitation to His people...but they aren't quite there yet, and oftentimes neither are we.

Yet, God comes to you, he reveals Himself to you and we ultimately know who Jesus is. He's the prophet who is a teacher and miracle worker...and also the one who will be rejected, crucified, and raised...He's God's final end-times prophet. HE's the prophet that heals broken, hopeless, and helpless people.

He's the prophet that brings purity to a polluted world. He's the prophet that saves you from your sin.

He's the prophet that comes into your life and makes what is unclean, clean. He took you and washed you clean with the waters of Holy Baptism. He takes you as unclean, broken, hopeless and helpless as you are and makes you clean, whole, full of hope and peace.

HE went into a funeral procession and caused death to go to life. This foreshadows His own resurrection and it foreshadows your resurrection, when he takes your dead, lifeless body and makes it alive again in both body and soul. Your body and soul will one day never be broken again. It will one day never again be hopeless and helpless. Your body and soul will one day no longer be unclean and polluted because of sin and sorrow, death and disease, trial and trouble. Your body and soul will one day be pure and free and live in perfect peace and harmony with each other. Your relationships will be whole, your relationship with the church will be healed, and most importantly your relationship with your Heavenly Father will never again be soiled with sin.

He will one day come into your own death and turn it around and make it life. He will cause you to live. For the day we gather in the church to worship God at your funeral is the day that some pastor tells the mourners...this person lying in the casket will live in both body and soul

again. It's the day that Christ comes and continues to bring comfort and compassion to the mourners and grievers. It's the day where the focus is all on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise of life for us, because He has great compassion on us.

It's the day that points us back to a time when another widow was mourning the death of her only begotten Son. This time this widow received a son in the person of the Apostle John. This time this only begotten Son wouldn't die again when He was raised, instead this only begotten Son lives for all eternity and He lives for you so that you can live again as well.

Jesus is known for taking death and overcoming it and making dead bodies full of life. So your dead body is now alive in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Living Lord and Savior. Amen.