

1 Kings 17:17-24
Galatians 1:11-24
Luke 7:11-17

Luke 7:11-17

¹¹Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. ¹²As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. ¹³When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" ¹⁷This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

There is a famous cliché that is said when people have given up trying to help someone else. When you have given advice and tried to help and done your best to turn around a bad situation – and the object of your efforts refuses to let you help – you might say, "Well, it's *your* funeral." That is a familiar way to announce surrender. In contrast to that well-known truism, Jesus walked up to a group of people he did not know and had not given advice nor tried to help, and said, "Well, this is *my* funeral." He took charge and he made some changes.

This is the *other* story about Jesus raising a man from the dead. If you had heard that today's Gospel lesson would be about a man being raised from the dead, you would have said, "The story of Lazarus; I know it well." This is the other one. This story does not have Jesus' conversations with the dead man's relatives like the story of Lazarus does. We do not hear about Jesus' grief. Jesus does not ask any questions about the man. As

nearly as we can tell, Jesus never even learns the dead man's name. Another difference in *this* story is that it takes place very publicly. There are more than family and friends here. Luke writes that Jesus came to a town called Nain "and his disciples and a large crowd went with him." Jesus' "large crowd" met another "large crowd." The words are: "As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town." Two large processions bumped into each other outside the city gate at Nain. If you were a witness to this confusion, who would you say was in trouble here?

Certainly this is the story of a miracle, but who gains from Jesus' power? Surprisingly, it is not the corpse, it is the corpse's mother. The scripture reads, "When the Lord saw *her*, he had compassion for *her* and said to *her*, 'Do not weep.' Jesus recognized loss in the life of the widow with the dead son. He "had compassion" for her.

Luke uses the word that is translated as "had compassion" other places in his Gospel – and it always leads to action. That is the word he uses in the Parable of the Good Samaritan; when the Samaritan sees the man, robbed and beaten, with no one to help him – he "had compassion." And you know what happened next. The Samaritan dressed the victim's wounds; he put the man on his donkey and took him to get some help. The Samaritan spent money and time beyond anything that was asked for. The Samaritan had compassion and he changed the situation.

Luke also uses the word in the Parable of the Prodigal Son; when the waiting father looks up and sees his son who had been beaten by life, now coming home, he "had compassion." The father did not wait for a request for help. He ran out to greet his son and prepared a feast and celebrated the reunion. The father "had compassion" and changed the situation.

Like the Good Samaritan and like the Waiting Father, Jesus had compassion. That means he does more than feel sorry about a bad state of affairs. He does something about it.

Jesus brings life. That means a good deal more than “Jesus started the dead man breathing again.” Jesus recognized loss and misery and he did something about it. He brought life.

There were no preliminaries. Jesus did not ask about sin, neither the widow’s nor the corpse’s. He did not ask about anyone’s faith or speculate on who deserved his help. Jesus did not give anyone post-miracle instructions about how to live from now on.

Jesus brought the power of God into the lives of people who needed it.

It would be easy to reduce this to a story about Jesus seeing a dead man and bringing him back to life. That is an attention-getting story, but it does not have a lot to do with us people who are still living and breathing. This is a story about Jesus seeing a person who is suffering loss and giving that person hope. **More than bringing life to a time of death, Jesus brings life to the struggle of living.** The people all recognize it. Their words, recorded in the Gospel, are: “God has looked favorably on his people!” They do not say, “God has looked favorably on a dead man.” It is the living people of God who need hope and courage and direction.

God’s people are the ones who need the miracle of life – the ones who are still making our way in the world. We need Jesus to step into our lives with the same courage to interfere with *our* loss and *our* confusion.

This is the kind of story that makes it hard to be a disciple. No one asked Jesus to raise the dead man. No one seemed to think he had a responsibility to do something about the woman’s loss. With no expectations to meet and no debts to pay, Jesus,

nevertheless, stepped forward from his crowd of people and walked into the crowd that did not know him and had not invited him – a grieving crowd that needed hope.

Disciples are called to take the love of God, the power of life, to people we do not know, people who do not expect anything of us, people who have no thought that we owe them anything.

I have known Christians to be kind. I have known them to work hard and be dedicated. I have known Christians to be generous and faithful. **But Christians are often hesitant to take the initiative.** We will pray for people, but we are not likely to tell people we are praying for them. It is very rare for us to ask people to pray for us.

Christians are more likely recommend a movie or a restaurant than they are to invite someone to worship with them. It is easier to address a straight-forward, observable need than it is to gather with others and search for hope and meaning. This is the kind of story that makes it hard to be a disciple because it asks us for more than time and money and effort. This story calls us to be deeper.

We are not called to raise a dead person, which we would be happy to do if we could. We are called to offer God's love to people who have not even considered the possibility of a life that means more than getting through their years with as much comfort and as few demands as possible. We are called to declare God's word of life to the living, the ones who need to hear it.

We have a word of hope, and Jesus calls us to speak that word to people who may not expect it. There are things we could know about God's word, and Jesus calls us to make it a priority to learn those things. God has placed us in a wonderful congregation, and Jesus calls us to ministry here drawing strength from each other.

I have never raised anyone from the dead; I've never been inclined to try. But we are all called to encourage people who have lost people they love. To strengthen people

who see no point to their faith. To remind each other that it is important to serve, and learn, and worship. To expect ourselves and our friends to live as people of God.

When we see living people whose lives are controlled by their anger, who preserve their disappointments, who are overwhelmed by the things they have lost – it is not time to surrender to a harsh world. That is *our* funeral and we can do something about it. We have a word to say about a life lived in the love and power of God.

Let us pray for the courage to speak God's word of life.