

Luke 7:11-17

Pentecost 3, June 26, 2022
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Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

In Christ Jesus, our reason for living and our hope in dying, dear fellow Christians:

There is something very familiar and very sad about the scene pictured in our text. What we see in Nain happens in our communities and around the world everyday. It is not at all unusual to see a black hearse slowly leading a procession of cars out to a cemetery. It is sobering to see the monster called death claim another victim.

Yet, while the funeral procession coming out of the city of Nain was a familiar sight, what happened next was extraordinary. While the death of the young man was cause for sadness, that grief was turned to joy. Instead of death ending life once and for all, we see life overcoming death. That gives us something to hold onto, a reason for hope in a dying world. Today, we look for help and strength to the One who calls Himself "The Life," the One who is stronger than death!

It would have been almost impossible to ignore the procession coming out of the gates of Nain. The large crowd filled the road as it made its way to the burial place outside the walls. The grief and its cause were obvious. It is hard to ignore the reality of death. It has been called the "ultimate statistic" that one out of one dies. The Psalm writer says, "The length of our days is seventy years-or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:10 NIV).

Mankind is powerless to change that. In spite of the incredible growth in knowledge of the human body and the discovery of new medicines and surgical techniques, people still die from disease. In spite of safety improvements in the work place, in the home, and in our cars, people are still hurt and killed in accidents. No one is exempt. Death can strike the young as well as the elderly, the healthy as well as the sick. Someone has said, "We live at a dying rate."

Death is a part of this world. But why? Why did the man at Nain have to die in the prime of life and leave behind a grieving mother who had already lost her husband sometime earlier? Why do our grandparents, parents, husbands and wives, and others we dearly love die? Why does God allow it? How can He be caring, loving, and powerful, and let it continue?

When death takes someone close to us, we are tempted to lay the blame on God, and call Him unfair or uncaring. But the fault for death is not God's at all. He never intended that even one person should die. When He created the first man and woman, He gave them perfect life. There was no disease, no harmful effects associated with aging, and no danger of accidents. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." That was God's will for mankind on earth. There was no death.

But then sin entered the picture. Mankind disobeyed God. God became justly angry. Death is the proof of God's anger at sin. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12 NIV). We cannot complain that God is unfair or that we deserve better. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We all die, because we are all sinners. Not only does sin condemn us to physical death, it also threatens us with eternal separation from God in the punishment of Hell. It's no wonder then that people fear death more than anything else. Many live desperate lives, driven by that fear to find some way of escape, only to realize in the end that they cannot hold off death with their own will or strength.

If events at Nain had followed their usual course, the funeral procession would have continued to the burial place and the lifeless body would have been put in a tomb. If we and the rest of the world had been allowed to follow along on the course set by sin, our walk, too, would have ended in death—eternal death.

But there in the path before us stands Jesus! He could have stepped aside and let the funeral procession go on, but He was filled with compassion for the grieving mother. He could have left all of us to the death we deserve, but He was filled with love for the entire world. He does not take pleasure in anyone's suffering or death. He loves you with an everlasting love that desires life for you. He did not come to punish the world, but to rescue it. "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10 NIV).

The Lord spoke words of comfort to the mother: “Do not weep.” [v.13] It was much more than a nice wish. The woman did not have to mourn as someone with no hope because Jesus, the Prince of Life, was there. He is the Lord, the Messiah-Ruler, whom God promised would be strong enough to defeat the most powerful enemy, even death. At Jesus’ command: “Young man, I say to you, arise,” [v.14] death had to give up its hold. The man sat up and began to talk.

When the grief or terror of death haunts us, the Lord Jesus is there to say, “Don’t cry.” And behind those words lie the power and victory of Jesus’ work in our behalf. His love for sinners is so tremendous that He was willing to meet death head-on so that we could live. He went to the cross for us! Imagine! He was the only one who had no sin, and therefore, did not have to die; yet for our sakes He wanted to suffer death and God’s anger over sin as our substitute. He died the most horrible death of all, loaded down with all the guilt of the world. It seemed as though death had won the ultimate victory as Jesus lay in the tomb. But then came the third day and Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Our living Savior is the proof that the debt of sin has been paid in full and that the power of death has been destroyed.

Christ assures you now, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). In and of ourselves we are powerless against death, but the Lord says, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24 NIV). We have new life. When we were born, our hearts were beating and our lungs were taking in air. We were physically alive, but already then spiritually dead in sin. Through baptism the Holy Spirit gave us the eternal life Jesus earned on the cross. We “crossed over” from death to life. That is our certain, glorious hope when death stares us in the face.

For the person who trusts in Jesus as the only Savior from sin, physical death cannot mean the end of life. Remember what Jesus told Martha when her brother died: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25 NIV). The body dies and is buried, but the life goes on. The Christian’s soul goes to be with the Lord. For believers death is a sleep from which the Lord will awaken them on the Last Day when He will return and raise us from the grave with glorified bodies. We look forward to living with Him in heaven where there will be no more sickness or death. We can confidently say with Job: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will

see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27 NIV).

As we journey through this earthly life, death will never be far away. The grim statistics will continue to be recorded on the pages of history. The funeral processions will still be a common sight. Sometimes we will feel the pain and loss very keenly. As the Lord did at the tomb of Lazarus, we will weep at the gravesides of loved ones. On the day the Lord has determined, each one of us will die. Yet we have a solid hope in Jesus Christ. He will always be at our side saying, “Look to Me and My cross for life. Trust My promise that no one and no thing can ever take away your life in Me. Believe that heaven is waiting for you.” In Jesus we have the life that is stronger than death.

That life gives us courage to face death, and it energizes our living here on earth. It gives us a reason to live. If you had been in the crowd which witnessed the miracle at Nain, how would you have reacted? We read: “Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen up among us’; and, ‘God has visited His people.’” [v.16] The news of the miracle spread like wildfire. If we knew of a cure for cancer, we would spread the news. We would tell everyone who would listen about this exciting breakthrough which would relieve so much pain and save so many lives.

The news we have received is far greater. It tells of a cure for the root problem of all pain, sickness, and death. It offers a life in Jesus which is stronger than death, a life for every sinner given free of charge to all who believe. God has come to help His people! He gives us LIFE! There is no more exciting and headline-worthy news than that! May we eagerly use our lives to share the news here until we join with all believers in praising Christ’s holy name in the hereafter. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (Philippians 4:7)