



6th Sunday after Pentecost -- June 29-30/July 1, 2024

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **Jesus teaches us about Death**

1. with His loving compassion 2. with His gracious resurrection

Sermon Text: Luke 7:11-17

11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 12 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. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” 14 Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 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.” 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

In the name of Jesus who is the LORD of Life, my dear Christian friends,

Put yourself in the sandals of the widow of Nain. You're leaving church. The funeral is over. You're headed to the cemetery for the burial. Ahead of you walk six strong men who carry the coffin. Inside that cold coffin is the body of your son, your ONLY son. You're numb from sorrow. Stunned, really. It was bad enough to lose your husband to death, but now you've lost your son too? Reality sets in. Now, there's no one to take care of you. Your family is gone.

Suddenly everything stops. The pall bearers stop. You stop. A stranger has stepped in front of the funeral procession. You don't know him, never seen him before – though he seems familiar. He wasn't at the funeral. You have no idea what he is doing there. Before you can object, he comes up to you like he knows you and says: "Don't cry." You are thinking to yourself: "Are you kidding me? Don't cry? This is a funeral. My only son is dead. I'm all alone in the world. Don't cry? Who are you to tell me what to do?" Before you can say a word, the stranger speaks again. Only this time, he's not talking to the living, but to the dead. He touches the coffin, and says in a loud voice: "Young man, I say to you, get up." The pall bearers just look at each other as if to say: "Is this guy for real?" But, suddenly, the coffin they were carrying begins to move. They quickly set it on the ground. And it's a good thing they do because as soon as it touches the ground, the young man who was dead is now alive. And he's talking!

Sounds like something out of a fantasy TV series! It's not. It's Biblical fact and true right out of the Gospel of St. Luke. In our sermon reading today, we will examine how Jesus raised a dead young man from the small town of Nain. And as we do, Jesus will teach us a thing or two about death. How will He do that? As God's only Son and our human brother, Jesus will teach us about death first of all with His loving compassion and then with His gracious resurrection.

Don't get the notion this was all a coincidence. In God's book, death doesn't come one second too early or late. The next time you witness a funeral procession, don't think you are there just by accident. It's by divine design. God wants you there for a reason (perhaps you can pray for the mourners, maybe He is helping you with your priorities in life) because He is there. In our sermon reading, Jesus was walking toward the small town of Nain when he saw a funeral procession. It was a sad occasion and Jesus knew it. A young man had died – the only son of his mother. Not only was he her life, he was also her provider. There was no social security to help and few job opportunities for widows. Now, things would be different, much different. A large crowd of people followed this funeral procession and felt sympathy for this mother. But, what could they do to help her in her grief? Nothing. They were helpless. Death does that.

Then, the Prince of Life enters the picture. Jesus can do more than just feel her grief. He can do something about her grief. Jesus was about to teach her about death. First, He had loving compassion for her. How do we know that? Luke records the details: ***When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."*** Jesus cared about this poor woman. He knew what was happening. And he hurt with her. But, He did something more. Listen to what happened next. ***Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk,*** Did you notice something odd about that last sentence? ***The dead man sat up and began to talk.*** It's simple. Dead men don't sit up. Dead men don't talk. Dead men don't leave their coffins and return to their mummies -- until Jesus shows up. When Jesus shows up, you never quite know what will happen.

Jairus, the father whose little girl died, can tell you that firsthand. When you get to heaven, just ask to speak to Jairus – he'll tell you how Jesus taught him about death, about how Jesus first had compassion in his time of need. The mourners were in the house. The funeral had begun. People thought the best Jesus could do was offer a respectful eulogy – some kind words about Jairus' little girl who had died. Jesus had some nice words all-right, but not about the girl, but FOR the girl. He said: ***Little girl, get up (Mark 5:41).*** The next thing they knew, Jairus' daughter was living and eating. Jairus was smiling, and the mourners were sent home early.

Martha, the woman whose brother had died, can tell you something similar. Just talk to her when you get to heaven. Martha had hoped Jesus would show up to heal her sick brother, named Lazarus. He didn't. Then, she hoped He'd show up to bury her brother. He didn't either. By the time, Jesus made the trip to Bethany, Lazarus was in the grave for four days and Martha was wondering if Jesus even cared. Finally, Jesus arrived. He told the people to roll the stone away from the grave. Martha protested that her brother's dead body would stink to high heaven. Jesus commanded: ***Lazarus, come out.*** And that's what Lazarus did. He came out of the grave.

In every Scriptural instance where Jesus raised someone from the dead, His heart first went out to them. He had compassion on those left behind. How do we know?

When Jairus begged Jesus to come, He came. When Jesus saw Lazarus' tomb, he cried. When He saw this widow crying, He had to do something to help her. In every instance, Jesus had loving compassion ... not first for the dead, but for the living – those who are left behind.

I have a good friend who is a funeral home director who tells me that statistically, every person will have to plan for at least two funerals during their lives. Maybe it's mom or dad, a spouse or your kids. And some of you already know what I'm talking about because you've had to do this already. Maybe you are suffering grief right now. Death hurts Christians too and we grieve. We need to know that when we are grieving, and all of us will, Jesus is at that moment, watching over us. As the Son of God, He knows our pain. As our human brother who knew what it was like to lose loved ones, He cares. When your mom dies of cancer, when the grandfather you never knew was killed in war, when your baby is stillborn, when your good friend is killed in an accident, Jesus has compassion and comes to us in ways we can see and many ways we can't.

So why hasn't He tried all our tears? In a world, where the wages of sin is still death, we must struggle with grief, pain, and death. But, remember Jesus does know what death feels like. And He has done more for us. On Calvary's mountain, Jesus willingly gave up His own life on the cross to earn heaven for every believer who dies. He paid for our sins and the wages death brings. He beat death at its own game, and victoriously rose from the grave to give all believers eternal victory. In love and compassion, He assures us that death didn't hold Him nor will it hold any believer. And He is able to dry our tears with His precious promises as we look in faith to Him.

It's nice that Jesus cares, but so what? If He really cared, then why does He allow death to hurt us so? That was really Martha's point when Lazarus lay dead in the tomb. ***Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died (John 11:32).*** Ouch! We know a bit how she feels because we've asked the same questions or we will ask them. "LORD, if you were doing your part God, my husband would have beaten that cancer." "If you are really a God of love, LORD, my baby would've lived." "If you really listened to my prayers, my arms wouldn't be empty now."

When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, our faith is rocked to the core. It's a rather human thing to do to have doubts, to have fears, But, let me ask you grave questions: why do we interpret death as the absence of God, as if God has disappeared? Why do we think that if the body isn't healed, then God is not near? Is healing the ONLY way, God is present in our lives? Sometimes we think so. And as a result of that human, but flawed thinking, when God doesn't answer our prayers the way we pray them, we get angry. When relief doesn't come, we become resentful. Blame replaces belief. "LORD, if you have been here doing your part, death wouldn't happen." My friends, when you get to heaven, ask this mom of Nain how she felt, and she'll tell you how weak she was as a human being. It's our nature to forget that God is always watching over us, always taking care of us, always working everything out for our eternal good. Yes, sometimes, we are allowed to suffer, so that God will receive the glory. We experience death so that God can shepherd us to a better, more beautiful

home in heaven – all because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we see death, we only see disaster. When God sees death, He sees deliverance. We are delivered from this imperfect body and life, to a perfect body life forever in the glory of heaven. Talk about giving us something to look forward to. A little boy had a terminal illness. He knew he was dying. So one day, he asked his mother a child-like question, “Mom, what’s it like to die?” His mom thought about it for a moment and finally said: “Do you remember when you used to play outside with your friends all day long? You’d be so tired, that at the end of the day, you’d fall asleep watching TV with your clothes on where you didn’t belong. Your dad carried you up the stairs into your room and tucked you into bed where you did belong. According to the Bible, that’s what death is like. It’s like going to sleep in this world and waking up in the world to come in heaven, safe in the arms of Jesus.

The dead man sat up and began to talk. What’s wrong with this picture? What kind of God is this? He’s the loving God who holds the keys to life and death. He’s the God who teaches you about death with His loving compassion and His gracious resurrection. He’s the kind of God you want at your funeral. God has a GREAT track record for resurrections. He’ll do it again, you know – for you and all those who know Jesus as their only Savior. He has promised He will. He has shown He can. **Because I live, you also will live (John 14:19).** Bank on it! Amen.