

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

September 27, 2020

St. Luke 7.11-17

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

“Why do you worry?” Jesus asked us last week. A disciple of Jesus trusts the Father’s care. You don’t need to be anxious; **“Your heavenly Father knows [what] you need.”** Well, that’s all well and good when things are going well and good. But then it’s all put to the test. A virus, an election, a bad meeting – something happens and the anxiety comes rushing in. Sleepless nights, stressful days.

Underlying it all is a fear we rarely name. Yet security systems, facemasks, rising firearm sales all reveal the omnipresent anxiety. Death is a monster to be kept at bay.

The Widow of Zarapheth is no stranger to the beast. She had been to the tomb before, with her husband’s body. We heard last week how she had been on the brink of starvation, measuring out the last of her flour and oil to bake one final cake of bread. She knows an anxiety we cannot fathom. Now the enemy has struck again. In her arms she clutches the breathless body of her only son.

In another time, another place, there is another woman. She too has been to the tombs with her husband’s corpse. The last remnant of their union—their only son—has just been cut down in the prime of life. The funeral bier proceeds relentlessly to the sepulcher. The soil of this accursed world is ever hungry to swallow another corpse. The Widow of Nain was helpless to prevent it.

On the way to the tombs,
Did she think of the vows she had made with her son’s father? *“Till death us do part.”* Are the words ever really understood when pledged? They come out of an unreal, impossible future. Yet whether the marriage lasts five years or fifty, death will part them. But the son? He is supposed to outlive his mother.

None of this do we want to face. Someone else's death is merely a traffic problem, and we wonder why Waze or Apple Maps didn't reroute us earlier. In the carpeted, saccharine houses of death, flowers mask the stench and cosmetics cloak the pallor of corruption.

Why do we waste the little time we have in this life on frivolous pursuits? Why is prayer and reading God's Word a chore we struggle to fit in? The 90th Psalm reminds us how swiftly pass the years:

- Thou turnest man to destruction;
And sayest, Return, ye children of men.**
- 4 **For a thousand years in thy sight
Are but as yesterday when it is past,
And as a watch in the night.**
- 5 **Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep:
In the morning they are like grass which groweth up.**
- 6 **In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up;
In the evening it is cut down, and withereth.**
- 7 **For we are consumed by thine anger. [vv3-7a]**

After reflection on how soon our life ends, the Psalm gives a lesson and a prayer:

- 11 **Who knoweth the power of thine anger?
Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.**
- 12 **So teach us to number our days,
That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.**
- 13 **Return, O Lord, how long?
And let it repent thee concerning thy servants.**

Here's the sequence: Death should makes us consider God's wrath over sin. That should turn our hearts to wisdom, that is, to God's Word. Then there is a prayer for God to return, *and* for God to repent. That seems to make no sense – until you remember that repent means to have a change of heart. Modern translations will render it, "Have compassion." That's our prayer. Death is coming. It's the wages of sin. But have compassion on us, dear Lord.

And that's why Jesus arrives on the scene. Both in general—God enters the world in the incarnation—and in specific, God comes to the Widow of Nain.

It probably seems too late. That's how the sisters of Lazarus reacted when Jesus came to that tomb. **"Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died."** But Jesus is never late. He arrives at precisely the right time.

Last week Jesus said, **"Do not worry."** Today He says, **"Do not weep."** When we say that, it's bereft of power. When our Lord speaks, however, He is capable of removing the cause of weeping. In the woman are fulfilled the words of today's Introit, from Ps. 86: **"Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day."** In Jesus is the grace for which she ~~prays.~~
cries

Dr. Luther described the doctrine of justification as a "happy exchange"; Christ takes our sin, we get His righteousness. Today Jesus demonstrates the "happy exchange" in action. Touching the bier (the platform that carries a dead body to the tomb) He halts the funeral procession in its tracks. This makes Him ritually unclean. No mere symbolic action, it is real. This boy's death becomes Jesus' death; Jesus' life becomes this boy's life. That's the happy exchange in action. The ultimate result will be this same scene for every Christian: the resurrection of the body.

That's the big story. The smaller story is the particular problem of this son's death. The dead son was the last remaining male who in that culture could care for her and provide for her economically. Here we see that Jesus loves particularly the most hopeless, the most desperate. Last Sunday Jesus' words were for the anxious. Today Jesus' action is for the downtrodden and despairing. In all things we see that our Lord **"is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think"** [Epistle].

So do not worry. For Christ is risen, and He says, **"Do not weep!"**

Christ is risen, and He stops death in its tracks.

Christ is risen, and He answers you in the day of trouble.

Christ is risen, and He will deliver you from the depths of Sheol.

Christ is risen, and little boys are given back to their mothers.

Christ is risen, and sins are blotted out.

Christ is risen, and your past is remembered no more.

Christ is risen, and He bids the dogma live loudly within us: Alleluia,

Christ is risen, *He is risen indeed, Alleluia!* +INJ+

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts in Christ Jesus.