

Trinity 16

September 19, 2021

Luke 7:11-17

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

The images and events within Afghanistan over the past month have been hard to watch. For those who served in Afghanistan, the emotions are mixed and raw. For some, this is where they were forced to grow up and mature - battling for life and death. For others, it is a place where they were given emotional or physical scars that will remain for the remainder of their earthly life.

Life would be easier if you could leave the experiences behind when you depart a war, but that's not how it goes. Instead, the dark memories of war patiently reside within one's head and await to be aroused when the journey of this life comes in contact with a sound, a taste, a smell, or an image that immediately takes one back to the battle, back to the fight, back to the death.

The images of the past month, the death of thirteen service members, did this for me as I am sure it did for many of you who have served in the Armed Forces. Once again, my mind was filled with the ramp ceremonies, the procession we make to place our dead upon the aircraft to bring our brothers and sisters home to their families. Families that reside a world away, unaware of the news that will soon greet them as they open their doors.

Undoubtedly, many of you have received a phone call to inform you of your father or mother's death. Their bodies simply could no longer hold up against the cancer or the heart disease.

Others may have received a knock on your door by an officer, "Sir, ma'am, we are sorry to inform you that there has been an accident - your child was killed and they will not be coming home."

For the remaining days of this life's journey, all it will take is to come in contact with a sound, a taste, a smell, or an image of that fateful day to pull you back into the moment, the day of sadness, the day of misery, the day when death drew near.

Where do you turn, and where do you go?

Do you lash out and line up to utter your complaints to the politicians (Take it Twitter, they will hear you)? Do you question the doctors and nurses asking, "Did you do everything you could to save my mother or father?" Or do you recoil and grieve as the widow in today's Gospel?

We don't know the widow's name. We only know she lost everything. First, her husband and now her son have died. She has no one to care for her, and she leaves no legacy, no offspring, no heritage. All she has is her grief and her tears.

The widow's son did not die for crimes against humanity, but rather, he was guilty as you and I are guilty – death came to him because of the sin he was born into. Luther writes, "*This mother could certainly lament her own guilt since she lost her son who had inherited sin and death from her.*" These are hard words to hear from Dr. Luther, but they remind us of the sin and death we all inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Since their fall in the Garden of Eden, all life joins this widow's procession in moving toward the grave. And yet, this funeral dirge is not the end of her life's journey, nor is the grave the end for you.

Without provoking, without calling out, Jesus saw the mournful crowd from a distance and leads His disciples and followers to the woman and orders her, "*Do not weep.*" And then He touched the open coffin of the boy and said, "*Young man, I say to you, arise.*" Thus, at this moment, Jesus takes into Himself this boy's sin and his death.

What a scene this must have been when the son was raised from the dead. The already decaying corpse and all the smells that go with it, given life and breath. The silent mouth, now given speech. The cold flesh, given to warm embrace as mother and son are united once again. This is what Jesus does in your lives.

For you who have suffered and continue to be haunted by the images of war etched within your mind; for you who have become paralyzed by the death of a mother, father, sister or brother, or even to be told the heart of the little one within your womb no longer beats; for you who have sat in the doctor's office to receive the darkest news – the illness is terminal.

For you, Jesus processes into the hells and storms of your life, all the disaster and death that surrounds you, and He has compassion.

His compassion is wrapped up in the entirety of His life. This compassion is the giving of Himself, the pouring out of His blood and His life upon the cross. It's a compassion

that can only be understood through the cross, where His death suffered all the torments of sin and hell for you.

It is Christ who the prophet Isaiah speaks of when he says, *“He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces.”* (Isaiah 25:8a) Your savior is not uninterested in your life; instead, He comes to you, seeks you, and visits you in your despair and in your most significant times of darkness.

In fact, as the young man sat up and began to speak, the people said, *“A great prophet has risen up among us; and, ‘God has visited His people.’”* (Luke 7:16)

God has visited His people and continues to visit you even now as grief and mourning over the events of life endure. Through the sounds, the images, even the smells and that which you taste on this day and in this place should draw you back into Christ Jesus, back into the Church, and back into the Divine Service.

It all begins in the waters of Holy Baptism, where you were plunged into the depths of Christ's death, and by His Word, you were raised out of these waters to new life. Every week you kneel before the altar before the crucifix, you confess your weaknesses, your sins, your struggle and sorrows, and Jesus hears them, and through the pastor, Jesus speaks life-giving words to you, *“arise, you are forgiven.”* As you process to the rail with the singing of angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven to receive His very flesh and blood, He touches you and gives Himeslef to you, saying, *“Arise! Depart in peace!”*

Depart in peace because death lost. Life won. Jesus won. His compassion gives you life eternal. May this joy and truth be your hope and assurance as you journey through this life, as the battles of war continue within, as you mourn the deaths of those you love, or face your grave yourself. Because on the last day, Jesus will return, and to all the faithful, He will call you from your graves to live with Him forever, saying, *“Child, arise!”* +INJ+

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