

The 16th Sunday after Trinity – Vicar Anderson sermon
Luke 7:11-17: “Jesus Fearlessly Collides with Death.”
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In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, You sent Your Son to be made flesh, that by His death He might atone for our sins and deliver us from eternal death: We pray, confirm in our hearts the hope that our Lord Jesus Christ, who with but a word raised the widow’s son, in like manner will raise us on the last day and grant us eternal life. Amen. (ELH Collect 113)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

11 Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” 17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who collided with death for you, whose victory over it is your own, giving you eternal life, dear fellow redeemed:

Physics tells us that a collision takes place when two or more structures or particles move toward each other and come near enough to interact and exert a mutual influence. One example of this is how billiard balls interact on a pool table. The opening sequence of a game is called the “break”, when the entire rack of balls is hit by the cue ball. If you have ever watched or played a game of pool you know that on a good “break”, the cue ball collides with the rest, ricocheting them all in different directions.

This morning we hear about a different kind of collision and its impact on everyone involved. However, instead of ricocheting into chaos, death or injury, this collision brought an end to all pain, suffering and death.

Jesus’ disciples and a great crowd were following Him towards a small town called Nain. Jesus had recently performed other miraculous things and this crowd following Jesus had heard and seen the powerful things He could do. They must have been filled with excitement and joy, even awe and wonder.

On their way into the town they encountered another crowd, one feeling anything but excitement and joy, processing out of the town. This crowd was walking towards the place outside the city where the graves are located. Bearers were carrying the body of a young man and were being followed by his mother a widow. Jesus could have gone around them and into the city, but instead He walked directly up to where the boy's lifeless corpse lay and He spoke life into him. Fearlessly the Lord collides with death.

Death was not a part of God's plan for us. Our God is not a God of the dead, but of the living (Mark 12:27). God intended for us to live forever with Him in perfect harmony. He created us perfectly and He intended us to stay that way (Gen. 1:27). Our bodies were never meant to fail us. But, man sinned and everything would change for mankind. This abrupt change caused an entirely different view of life. Instead of never having to worry about death now every person has to face it and this brought a tremendous amount of fear.

It is natural to avoid death, because it is contrary to man's very being. Out of fear people attempt to prevent death or even things that resemble death. We cling tightly to this life, wanting to know when we will die, or how we will die. Questions like these became more prevalent when an unknown deadly virus began quickly sweeping across the globe and continues to threaten us today.

We are gripped in fear because death is a guarantee, and while our flesh fights against it, it cannot stop it. We think we would rather have death come when we expect it, but death is never convenient. We want to control when death comes, but just as we had no control over our birth we have no control over our death. We often forget that the one who gives life is also the one who takes it away (Deut. 32:39).

Death causes the sin of doubt and anger to bubble up inside each of us. We ask questions like; "does God know what He is doing, why would God let this happen?" We shake our fist at God saying, "if you loved me God you wouldn't have done this to me. Maybe You don't love me after all?" The devil delights in seeing us filled with doubt and anger towards God because it is at those times when we are most vulnerable to his attacks.

Thankfully, we do not face death and its consequences alone. Our Lord Jesus never once feared death. He says, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." (John 10:17b-18a). Jesus cannot die unless He allows Himself to, He does not fear death because He has power over it.

We see how Jesus approached the lifeless man without any fear or trepidation. He put His almighty hand upon the bier, which is similar looking to a stretcher. The body was laid upon it and carried by bearers and as Jesus touched it the bearers stopped. Then Jesus said "young man I say to you arise" and the man woke up as if he were only sleeping (Thess. 4:14). Jesus stopped that procession of death right in its tracks, bringing an end to the mourners' sadness and despair.

Some of you here have lost a close friend, some a mother or a father, some have lost a spouse, and some have even lost your children. Jesus has compassion on you like He had compassion on that widow. Jesus was with you in that deepest moment of grief. He continues to be with you through those moments when you miss those loved ones. When that pain in your stomach and in your chest returns know that Jesus aches with you (Luke 7:13). He does this out of His abounding and steadfast love for you!

That is exactly what He felt for the widow who lost her only son. Jesus knew how much pain and suffering she had endured, first losing her husband, now her only son. He knew all the uncertainty and fear that accompanied her sadness. It made Him ache with compassion for her. So much in fact, His very guts or inward parts ached. He says to her, "Do not weep." Not a chastisement, instead it was "look, see that I am about to provide for you a reason to stop weeping."

Think about the times you have been told, "Everything is going to be okay," "things will get better," after something tragic has happened. Although that person meant well you found those words hollow and lacking because they had no power behind them to make things okay. This is not how Jesus works; instead He gives you what you do not deserve. He gives you the things you are afraid to ask Him for because you deem them impossible. Only Jesus can say, "do not weep" and provide you a reason not to.

When you lose a loved one from this life, or death seems to be approaching know that Christ has already given you a reason not to weep. He has already conquered death through His resurrection from the dead. Jesus' compassion was not for the young man; it was for his grieving mother left all alone here on earth. Jesus knows all that you have been through. By Jesus bearing the cross for us and dying upon it He has taken away all your sins, including the sins of doubt and anger towards Him.

The theologian and hymn writer Paul Gerhardt boldly says, "Though a heavy cross I'm bearing and my heart feels the smart, shall I be despairing? God, my helper, who doth send it, well doth know all my woe and how best to end it" (ELH 377:2).

You have certainty that Jesus knows your sorrow and pain. Throughout His life and death He experienced every pain and suffering this broken world brings. He was rejected, mocked and laughed at, spit on and scourged. He put the weight of the world's sin upon His shoulders and with each blow of the whip to His body felt the pain of your sin.

He went to the cross and paid the full penalty for your sin before giving up His spirit. He willingly died to conquer death for you; His death is the answer for your death. The Lord then descended to hell not in defeat but instead to proclaim His victory over sin death and the devil. He rose to show the world His holy life and sacrificial death was a sufficient payment to God the father.

Our living Lord and Savior is still with us, speaking His life into us through His powerful Word. He spoke life into the young man of Nain and spoke hope into his lonely mother.

The young man's temporal life was restored; but because sin and death remain here he would eventually die again. But what has been created in you is eternal. All our loved ones who died in the faith live this very day in the presence of their Savior, and you will be in His presence one day as well.

St. Paul writes, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). This "newness of life" is happening now in each one of you and it continues on after death. You are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) and now have the assurance that because Christ lives you shall live also.

You died once to sin already at your baptism and have risen from death to life with Him through your baptism. Jesus performed a life-giving miracle in each one of you. Christ spoke His living Word into you and your spiritually dead heart was awakened to a new life of faith. The washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit created in you a clean heart (Titus 3:5-6; Psalm 51).

These Words of forgiveness continue to come to you daily when you repent of your sins and receive His holy absolution. He has given you the means to believe in Him, and the means to strengthen that faith by Word and Sacrament. His compassionate and merciful Word continues to bring you comfort, life and forgiveness.

You and I will all have to face death unless Jesus returns before then, but you do not need to fear it! You obtained Jesus' righteousness by faith and you also obtained His victory over death by faith (Isaiah 25:8, 1 Cor. 15:51-55). For you an earthly death is but a portal to an eternal life! "Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

The Lord fearlessly collided with death and destroyed it for you. He stopped it in its tracks and spoke life into you. Just as Jesus awoke the young man so too will His all-powerful Word awake your body when He comes again. In Jesus' second coming, the one who has fearlessly collided with death will speak His Word and your already glorified soul will re-unite with your mortal body and you will become glorified both body and soul.

Death will not defeat you because Jesus defeated death. Martin Luther wrote about this powerful victory in his great Easter hymn: "It was a strange and dreadful strife when life and death contended. The victory remained with life (with Jesus), the reign of death was ended; Holy Scripture plainly saith, that death is swallowed up by death, In vain it rages o'er us." (ELH 343:4)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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