

St. Paul says that we do not grieve like the heathen, like those who have no hope. But he does not say that we do not grieve. Instead he tells us to grieve with those who grieve and weep with those who weep. This is enough reason for all of us to make it a point to attend every funeral of a member at Mount Calvary. It's worth taking off work. The death of a Christian is a holy thing – precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. And we Christians, especially in our local congregation, are family. We call the same God Father. We call the same Savior our Brother. We claim the same Spirit as the Giver of our Life. We eat together at the same altar, receive the same body and drink from the same cup. We share the same conversation and live by the rules of the same house. When one grieves all grieve. When one rejoices all rejoice.

The widow of Nain had the whole congregation at the funeral of her son. A “**large crowd**,” it says. It is exactly a situation like this that will still attract a crowd today; when a young man or young lady dies. It still forces humanity from people – this is tragic, this should not happen, no mother should have to see her child die before her. But when it comes to the old, we see empty sanctuaries and sometimes no funerals at all. But as little as we would skip the funeral of our earthly family, so little should we skip the funerals of the family of God.

First, because it is a public act of love you show to your neighbors. Jesus says, “**they will know you are my disciples because you have love for one another.**” This is one of those beautiful works of love, to attend a Christian funeral, to pay respect to a member of the family of God, to show the world around you that for you, being a Christian and belonging to a family of believers means that you are bound to them by a love that is stronger than any other friendship or any mere blood tie, because what binds you together is the blood of God.

It is exactly this kind of seemingly easy, seemingly simple, seemingly little good work that makes all the difference and yet is so easily neglected. We have all, or at least almost all, fallen out of this good Christian habit. But if we were to fall back into it, simply think of the beautiful confession it will make in your workplace, in your community, in your family, to those who attend from outside, to the workers at the funeral home, that this sanctuary is constantly full at funerals, because we love one another, because we are not playing church, we are the church, the family of God, and we act like it. The pagans used to say of the Christians, “Look how they love one another.” God grant they say it again and come to find out what it is that makes us love, come to see the love of our Father who so loved us that He gave His Son to the shame and suffering and death and curse of the cross to win us as His children.

This gets to the second reason we should make it a point to come to funerals. Because it IS an act of love, of charity, to weep with those who weep and to grieve with those who grieve. Because we DO love one another. The woman in our Gospel shows what death does to a person, she is the extreme example. Death leaves her alone. She's a widow. She has no husband. She now has no child to comfort her. She's alone. It's a beautiful thing that when Christ sees her, He pities her, his heart is grieved for her, because this is exactly how her fellow Christians feel. That's why they're there. That's why they go to the funeral.

But unlike Jesus, they can't do anything about it, except grieve, except cry with her: that is their act of love and it is beautiful. But Jesus can do something, because He can do everything. His act of love is to end death and to force it into obedience, to make it give up its prey. And it is exactly His love and His

mercy and His power over death, that animates our love and our weeping and our words of comfort and our simple presence at a funeral of a Christian. This is why the Christian is never alone, because a Christian always has Christ – I am with you always – and always has the Church – the gates of Hell shall not prevail against her.

Next, funerals are good for us. We need them. We see death at a Christian funeral, that it's real and that we have to face it. This is what the wise man in Ecclesiastes says, **"It is better to enter into the house of mourning than the house of feasting, since death is the end of every man and the living should take this to heart."** It's better to go to a funeral than a party, because it's good for you to see the reality of sin, what it does to us. It kills us. This is the corruption we bear in our own bodies. It's the corruption in which we participate every time we sin. And this death, this end of life, is antithetical to God, who is Life. It is itself the judgment that we start out separated from God in body and soul, in the hell where there is no life and no love and no good, because God who is Life and Love and Goodness is not there. So the funeral gives this beautiful opportunity to you of repentance, of seeing and contemplating and knowing what the wages of sin are, because you see it, so that you can know your need truly, deeply, and constantly of your Savior God.

And this is the greatest benefit of attending a Christian funeral. And I say a Christian funeral. Not a gathering where we hear nothing but happy memories of the deceased and ignore the rotting elephant in the room. A Christian funeral is where the death that we see is confronted by the Gospel that is sure, that this dead body will rise from the dead. As surely as that young man rose because Jesus said, **"I say to you, arise,"** just as surely will the body of this Christian rise from the dead, immortal, made like the glorious body of our Savior.

This is why we should make it a priority for ourselves, our parents, our loved ones, to have the body present in the church at a funeral. This Christian truth – that this same body will rise from the dead - is directly tied to the most basic assertion of all Christianity: Jesus is the Son of God who rose again from the dead, in His body. A dead fish we flush down the toilet. A dead animal in the road, we hope someone comes along and bags up. Because they're not going to rise from the dead. When their life is over it is over. But a man, a woman, a child created in God's image, we lay in the ground, in a cemetery, literally, a sleeping place, in the sure and certain hope that this body will rise up out of death. Because our Savior has risen. Our Savior has conquered death. And we belong to Him. He is our head, and we are His body, and if the Head lives, and He does live forever, glorious, reigning over all things, if the Head lives, then so must the body. It is a necessity.

You have been joined to Christ in your Baptism. He has given you His life just as surely as He suffered your death. You have taken His life-giving body and blood into your mouth trusting that because He lives you will live also. The sin you were born in, the sin you have committed, Christ has already paid its punishment, God has forgiven, and you've heard it as from God Himself, that it is sure in heaven, and if there is no sin, then death must give up its prey. It simply has no right over those who belong to Jesus, the Lord of Life, no power over those who live now by His Spirit.

It is not for us to avoid the topic of death. It is for us to face it with Christian certainty. If Job, who lived a thousand years before Jesus, who knew nothing about crucifixion, who knew only a shadow of what we know, if Job can confess with such confidence, **"I know that my Redeemer lives and at last He will stand upon the earth, and even when my skin is destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God."**

My eyes shall behold Him, I and not another.” Then we have much more reason to be confident and sing, “Death you cannot end my gladness, I am baptized into Christ the crucified.”

And this is what Jesus’ raising of the son of the widow of Nain gives you. It’s why He did it. Jesus pitied her. He pitied her son. This is what He came to do. He pities you. It’s why He became like you, subject to all that you suffer, even death. He doesn’t avoid death. He touches it. He confronts it. He takes it on Himself, suffers to enter into it, that it might be swallowed up in His Life.

He speaks with total authority – **“I say to you, arise.” “I say to you.”** This is the word of the Creator whom everything must obey. These are the words of the Redeemer who has taken it on Himself to pay death’s penalty, I say to you, the almighty God whom every creature must obey, even death, so do not doubt. It’s the same Jesus who says to you, ‘Take eat. Take drink. The same Jesus who says to you, “I forgive you all your sins.”

Then fear of death is replaced by fear of God, of His awesome power and His bottomless love. They don’t fear death at the end of this Gospel. They’re afraid, but not of death. They fear the One who conquered death. The one whom death obeys. So when the fear of death confronts you, and it will, now and in the hour of your death, see that it obeys Jesus. Jesus has the power over it. All authority in heaven and earth. Over everything. Death does what He commands. And His command for you is eternal life. So fear Him and trust in Him, come to funerals, and confess before God and the world that death is swallowed up by the Life which is Christ Jesus our Lord.