

## Jesus Ruins A Funeral

Luke 7:11-17

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

June 9, 2013 – Third Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. This may sound a bit strange to your ears, but truth be known, I love a good funeral – and I’m not alone. If you ask just about any pastor, he’ll probably tell you the very same thing. In fact, I can remember a pastors’ conference some years back where the presenter asked the men who were there which they preferred, a wedding or a funeral. A few hands went up in support of weddings, but funerals received the vast majority of votes. Like me, most pastors, at least in our Church body, seem to love a good funeral. Why? Well, at a funeral, more so than at a wedding, you’re usually dealing with people who are actually paying attention. But the biggest reason is because a Lutheran funeral service is so rich in Gospel content. It’s a wonderful opportunity to preach to people who are acutely aware of the reality of death. Because a dead body is a powerful preaching of the Law – reminding us that that the wages of sin *is* death – people’s ears are more attuned to hear the sweet message of the Gospel. That’s why I love a good funeral.

But don’t get me wrong. It’s not like I’m eager to do a funeral service anytime soon. Still, no one knows the time or the day when God will to call them home. One thing *is* certain, however, and that is that when Jesus shows up as He did in this morning’s Gospel, He’s going to disrupt everything. Again, here’s the situation. Jesus and His disciples were entering into the town of Nain, but as they drew near, they saw another procession heading out of town – the funeral procession of a young man, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. There was a lot of grief in that funeral procession, as you might imagine. But they were doing it up right, carrying the young man’s body out to the graveyard for burial on a funeral palate, as was the custom. It was a proper funeral, with a good size crowd showing support for the grieving mother.

Assessing the situation, Jesus’ heart went out to this grieving mother and He was deeply moved. Having compassion on her, He approached her and spoke. “Do not weep,” He said. Obviously, Jesus hadn’t read “The Pastor as Counselor” during His time at the Seminary! “Do not weep” isn’t something you’re supposed to say to someone mourning the death of a loved one! You’re supposed to allow the bereaved go with their feelings,

express themselves, and let it all hang out. You most certainly shouldn’t say: “Do not weep!”

But that’s precisely what Jesus said anyway. And what He did next was even stranger. He stopped the procession, stepped up to the dead boy’s body, touched it and said: “Young man, I say to you, ‘Arise.’” Talk about cruel! It was as if Jesus was playing with their emotions. The people who witnessed this probably thought He was mad or delusional – speaking to a dead body and expecting it to come back to life again. But, strange as it may sound to us and those who saw this happen, that *is* precisely what took place! The young man arose, sat up and began to speak. Then Jesus gave him back to his mother!

Way to go, Jesus! Way to ruin a perfectly good funeral! There everyone was, in the proper mood, all grief-stricken and such. They had rented a nice funeral bier. They had gone out and prepared the gravesite according to their custom. They had lined up the pallbearers. People had taken time off from work. And then Jesus goes and ruins it all! Who does He think He is? That’s really the question, isn’t it? Who is this Man, Jesus, who thinks it’s OK to disrupt a funeral like this? And this wasn’t the first time He had done something like that. There was also that incident with the little twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus. She had also been laid out nice and proper with lots of mourners on hand when Jesus shooed them all out, stepped up to her body and said to the lifeless child, “Talitha, cumi!” – that is, “Little girl, arise!”

Oh, and we dare not forget that time when Jesus came to the tomb of His friend, Lazarus, who had already been dead and buried three days. Along came Jesus with a loud voice and commanded Lazarus to come forth. And to the shock and surprise of everyone – as if he had just stepped out a Mummy movie – that is precisely what Lazarus did. Can you imagine, this Jesus fellow commands a dead body to arise and come forth, and it happens! What is it about Jesus’ words and voice? They are life-giving and powerful, that’s what! They disrupt funerals, turn the deceased into the living, transform mourners into revelers, and maybe even make it necessary for certain funeral directors to return their client’s money.

Dear Christian, do you think Jesus might have some of those very same words for you someday? He does,

you know. Maybe not right away. It's not very likely to happen at your funeral or the funeral of a loved one, but Jesus does have words for you – and I guarantee you will hear them on the Last Day, when Christ returns. On that Day He will speak a great big “Arise!” as He calls out to all who have been appointed to everlasting life. Just imagine the cemeteries that will be ruined, all the tombstones that will be shattered, and the mausoleums and crypts that will crumble and be broken wide open.

After all, Jesus even ruined His own funeral on that first Easter morn as the women were headed out to the place where He was buried to finish anointing His body. Only, when they arrived they discovered there was no dead body to prepare for burial! And when they did see His body it was very much alive! That's why I can say so confidently that Jesus has a life-giving word for you – that there is most definitely an “Arise!” in your future. For in spite of what I said earlier, and as I'm sure you already know, there really is no such thing as a “good” funeral. Funerals are not what God intended for any of us. Death is an alien intruder. Men and women were not meant to die. Death only came about as a result of Adam and Eve's fall into sin – that moment when our first parents thought they knew better than the Creator of all things who first made us, gave us these bodies, and breathed life into our souls.

Following the lead of Adam and Eve we also wanted to be our own god, and to make our own decisions about right and wrong. So we tuned out both God and His Word. Like Frank Sinatra, we did things our way, and that way is called sin. Even though we know better, we still do it. In myriads of ways we live as if we matter most and as if God doesn't matter at all. We live to serve and satisfy our own selfish wants and desires as we seek to be free from God and pretend He's not there. We hurt one another with our words, our actions and our loveless inaction. And most of the time we don't feel the least bit sorry about any of it.

And it's this sin and sinning which has brought the curse of death upon our heads. From the moment of our entrance into this world we are headed for the grave. We are dead men walking, even before it's time to lay us in the ground. Like it or not – and we don't – that's the sad reality. But unlike us, there is One who didn't deserve to die. His name is Jesus. He had no sin of His own, and there was never a good thing He neglected to do, even as we see here in the story of this poor widow whose dead son Jesus raised back to life. Those are the kinds of things Jesus does – kind things, loving things, righteous things.

And yet He is the One condemned as unrighteous. He is the One Crucified and hung on Calvary's cross as a common criminal. And that's what He was, for in truth, He died bearing our sin and shame. He became sin so that we might become righteous. The death He died was the death we deserved. His holy blood purchased our redemption and forgiveness. For if the Son of God dies for you, that's a lot of forgiveness. It's enough to cover the sin of the whole world! It's enough to overcome death and empty out the tombs of every graveyard in the entire world – including yours! And that's precisely what happened on Easter morning when Jesus rose from the dead. That's the preview Jesus gives us here in this text when He raises the young man from Nain. Jesus, you see, Jesus is in the life-restoration business.

Jesus does works no one else can do, like raising the dead – works that show He comes from God. So, who does this Jesus think He is? He doesn't just think, He knows. He is the very Son of God come down from heaven to bestow on His people the twofold gift of life and salvation! Or, putting it another way, Jesus is the Funeral Disruptor, par excellence! He gives life simply by speaking the words of life – the very same words He has for you. Listen to them once again: “Your sins are forgiven you.” “I have come that you may have life, abundant life.” “This is My body, this is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin.” “Peace I give to you, My peace I leave with you.” And one of my favorites: “I will come and take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”

And while all these words are good to hear as you make your way through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, on the Last Day Jesus will have another word for you: “Arise!” And when you hear *that* word your body will rise up and come out of the grave, new and glorious, no longer subject to death. So I suppose, in the end, there probably is such a thing as a “perfectly good funeral.” For the funeral services we have now are in reality soaked with the life of Jesus, filled through and through with the promises of God, and filled to overflowing with the firm faith God gives us – faith in our Lord Christ who specializes in ruining the funerals of the faithful who look to Him for every good gift and receive everything from His hand knowing that He will sustain them body and soul unto eternal life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.