

Pastor T.C. Arnold
16th Sunday after Trinity
Luke 7:11-17
Sept 15th, 2013

How would you define the word, “visitation?” That seems like a silly question, doesn’t it? It’s an easy and common word. I guess the reason why I’m asking is because in our Gospel text for today we perhaps have a couple of ways we could understand what visitation means.

It says in the text that after Jesus tells the woman not to weep, touches the bier (the coffin) and says, “*Young man, I say to you, arise,*” that fear seized the people and they glorified God. They said, “*A great prophet has arisen among us!*” And then they said something else. They said, “***God has visited His people!***” What does that mean? Are they talking about Jesus coming and sharing some encouragement, some words, or some kind of “good work” and then leaving? That’s the way we think of visitation. A person comes, stays for a little while, offers something, shares some nice words, and then leaves. That’s what a person does during a visit.

But there could also be another way to understand a visit. It’s not just a short stay, but rather a life changing gift of compassion and grace. That may not have been the way the crowd in the text thought about the visit of Jesus. They probably thought that He comes for a short time, does some good things, helps people out here and there, raises the dead, and then goes on His merry way. However, in another place in the Gospel of Luke we do have the correct, divine, and true understanding of what God “visiting” His people means.

Do you remember what Zechariah said after his son, John the Baptizer, was born? The Holy Spirit caused Zechariah not to speak for a long time. But finally after John was born Zechariah was able to speak. He said, “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has **visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us...***” For Zechariah, God visiting His people was connected to God’s redemption of His people. He visited AND redeemed. Now that’s a different kind of visit than the one mentioned before. That visit presupposes a longer stay. That kind of visit is a visit that never ends. In our daily actions and words, that is not how we understand visit.

In our visits, we take the time, we do our thing, we get it done and then forget about it. We think of visits as if we are accomplishing a task and when we get that task finished, we are finished. I’ve got it checked off. I can forget about it. In our visitation we get something taken care of, another errand on a long list of stuff we have to do this week done. I’m confident that it has much to do with the way we approach our visits – or define this word – that causes us to have a certain kind of attitude toward what we have before us in life. Allow me to explain.

If service to our neighbor is just a task to take care of for the day, we really are missing the mark of what it means to be a neighbor. Being a neighbor means never giving up the service to our neighbor. This means our visitation is not a moment in time but a task that is before us all the time. Your neighbor in need is never in need just once. Your neighbor in need is in need each and every day of his or her days. God does not call you to be a neighbor... to be a visitor... only once – or for a short time – or when it is convenient for you. God calls you each to into service. Yes, even when it is difficult. Yes, even when the desire might not be so great. A visitor (like the one defined by Zechariah) “keeps on” visiting.

The same would be the case for service to the Lord. You didn’t meet your monthly quota by being here today. You didn’t find yourself with an extra place in God’s heart because you visited

the Lord's House and did something great for Him today. You didn't gain points by sucking it up and putting in a little extra time for the Lord this past week. That's not how visitation works.

Our visitation here is to be a mainstay. You see, our visitation here is for a particular purpose. It's not for God – it's for you. And that's why there is no quota – just opportunity. Visitation for service to your neighbor is never a once in a lifetime thing – just like being a parent or a son or a daughter is not something you do only once. Visitation for the sake of your neighbor continues. And so it is for the sake of your life as well. God serves you here. He desires to give you what God gives – life and forgiveness through Word and Sacrament – in this place. Apart from this place, God's service is hindered.

The crowd in the Luke seven text was rejoicing over a prophet of God that came to the city of Nain to visit the people. What do people do when they visit? They come, do something nice – or even great – and then go on their merry way... like our favorite band visiting our city on a tour stop. Jesus didn't come to visit in this way. He came to give life. This was but a small showing of the kind of life that Jesus would give in His glorious visitation. He didn't come to show off or do miraculous works that would cause the people to be impressed. He came to visit – to serve – never to leave – even after He would leave town to go somewhere else. His visitation stuck around.

Beloved, you are in the place where God visits His people. This visitation continues week after week – for you – day after day right here. Don't make your visitation here a one-time thing. God doesn't visit once. He visits you each day. Don't visit once to receive what you need. You need what you need each day and that is how our Lord gives it to you. Never be apart from His Word. Never leave these precious gifts given to you from the font and the altar alone. He visits and redeems His people. Beloved from the cross is His visitation. From His blood is His continual presence.

Does your cross visit you? What I mean is, do those things that continue to press upon you, sufferings, sicknesses, weaknesses... the crosses that you bear, visit and then go away and disappear? They don't. Your cross may not be as heavy at times, but it is still there – it is always there – it visits you constantly.

Enter the cross of Jesus – that visits you and never leaves you... *“Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you,”* says the Lord. God comes to us through weaknesses and suffering. *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,”* says our Lord again. It's popular to think that God only comes in strength and in power. But God comes in weakness and suffering as well. When the burden of your cross is great, *“God visits and redeems”* His people. It's not a sideshow. It's not a “good times had by all” type of visitation. It's an everyday visitation which may mean good times or it may mean the worst of times. He visits every day – *“I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”* He has not abandoned you. He does not take a break when you suffer.

May our visitation to our neighbor and to our Lord not be a one-time and then forget it thing. That's what the crowd thought in the Gospel text. That's how they would define visitation. But not God. God bestows His gifts while visiting His people. He visits you. He has so much to give to you. Don't overlook this continuous blessed visitation. He meets you and visits you here with His gifts. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.