

## Sermon for Trinity 16 – Luke 7:11-17

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Death. For most, it's not something we face on a day-to-day basis. Sure, there's always the occasional housefly and spider to smash. True, we still swat those late summer mosquitoes in the early evenings. And there's the roadkill on the streets. But who's butchered a chicken lately? Who's lopped off the head and looked into the glazed life-less eyes? Or pulled out the feathers? We usually go to the grocery meat counter or freezer section and buy the packaged parts, ready to cook.

But for all our avoidance of death, it still hits us. When a loved one, be it family or friend passes away, we are struck by the loss with grief's aftershocks reverberating for the rest of our lives. We experience death as an enemy – as a St. Paul would say, the last and greatest enemy. We dwell in a land of deep darkness and in the shadow of death. We are those “who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

The widow at Nain was acquainted with death and grief all too well. She was a widow, which means that she had lost her husband. But now her son, her ONLY son, died and is carried along in a tearful and sad funeral procession, not unlike the ones we've seen in our times.

But another procession was heading its way. It was Jesus and His disciples. The first procession confronts us with death. The other is led by Him who is death's Conqueror and the Prince of Life. Before Him, even death must yield. He leads His procession against death – He comes to us. He comes to rescue us.

If we could look into other people's minds, we would likely see a sight that would astonish and maybe even frighten us. We'd see many concerns and bitter distress of which we'd never have an inkling or thought of before. Great trouble and misery can always be hidden behind an outward carefree spirit.

Think about how infinitely many things there are that can worry us – that can burden us! Hardships and adversities. Loss of our health and finances can happen in a snap! Maybe it's a bad relationship in the home or a stressful disagreement we've gotten into with our neighbors. What about our children who are lost and fallen into sin. Or our own sins, both old and new. It could be bearing the cross of some illness that is laid on you or your family, and in that you have one of your heaviest burdens. Or it could be like the widow at Nain: that death has cast its shadow on your home. Who can mention everything that here in the world could cause us human beings anxiety and sadness?!?

Most everyone would rather cast their sorrows away, if that were possible, and forget them completely. Sometimes this works for a while. But usually only a short time and then it gets worse again. Others of us like to be strong and carry our sorrows by ourselves, without any help. In that case, our troubles only get bigger, gain even more power over us and we end in despair. Perhaps this was the case for the widow at Nain and her son.

When young people die we feel especially the shattering and crushing power of the dominion of death. Even Jesus felt this. In the Gospel accounts, all three people who Jesus caused to rise from the dead on various occasions were young people. Maybe Billy Joel was right: Only the Good Die Young. There was the widow at Nain's son, of course.

Then there was the temple official's daughter at whom onlookers scoffed and laughed at the possibility of her living again. The Lord Jesus obviously had the last laugh on that one. Finally there was Jesus' friend Lazarus who rested in the grave 3 days. In that occasion, He who commands the widow at Nain not to weep, He Himself weeps. But that's the point: He who took on our flesh also takes on our tears and crying and sadness so that in the resurrection, Jesus will wipe every tear from our eyes.

Real comfort we find only in Him. If He was able to dry tears when everything was lost for a widow, He will also help you in all your sorrows. However lowly you are, He will not send you away. Do you think He doesn't know your need? He sees it. Learn to know what St. Paul calls the length and the breadth and the depth and the height of Christ's love. Tell Him what's in your heart. Whatever it is that is pressing on you, tell Him about it so that you can say, "I have told it to the Lord. Now I must hope in Him and He will do it. I will wait for His time with patience. He was able to create pure joy in the widow's heart with a word; it doesn't cost Him any more to help me."

That said, we can also take comfort in the words of Psalm 91: "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling ... Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him."

By nature, we are scared and frightened of death. In bitter sorrow we stand at the deathbed of our loved ones. But when you can say, "I believe in 'one Lord Jesus Christ ... And on the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures ... and look for the resurrection of the dead,'" what can you fear from death?!? Can death separate you from Him?!? Are the dead also dead to Him? When it's said, "It's over," is it really over? Most certainly NOT. No! Because Jesus says, "Because I live, you shall live also." This is our hope in the presence of death. It's not based on human speculation. It's based on the acts which God himself has done and has allowed us to know and see and hear, to eat and to drink.

Those who die in the Lord are not dead. Their misery and sorrow are dead ... but their life is in Christ, the Lord of Life. With Him their souls are at rest. And neither are their bodies forgotten. They are a grain of wheat that shall not perish. It's exceedingly important that we confess the resurrection of the body! How many fathers and mothers will rejoice on that day when they hear: "You have your child again—forever!" How many daughters and sons will abound in joy to have their fathers and mothers forever! What a reunion awaits us! Thanks be to God who gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠