

I.N.I.

WHEN GOD PAYS A VISIT

Homily for the Third Sunday after Pentecost-C, 5. June, A.D. 2016
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 2958-59th St., Sacramento, CA

Luke 7:11-17 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. (ESV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. [Rom. 1:7]

When God pays a visit, many times it is to take someone's life--somebody dies and pretty soon there's a procession to the cemetery.
Do you know that there's a city in California that has no cemeteries? Big City! Not far from here--yes, San Francisco!
It started in the year 1900 when the city supervisors passed a law prohibiting burials in San Francisco.
It took until 1937 for them to do away with all graveyards, but I'm told there are 11,000 corpses still under the Lincoln Park Golf course, and that you can see broken bits of gravestones in the retaining walls and drainage gutters of Buena Vista Park.

What happens to a city without funeral processions?
In our Gospel today we have a funeral procession, one that stands out in the N.T.
Our Lord Jesus did the unthinkable and brought a young man back to life.
That was **God** paying a visit to the little town of Nain.
Today I am reminding us all that God pays only two kinds of visits: those made in judgement, and those made in His grace and love.

Part I. God Pays a Visit in Judgement.

Point 1, A Severe Loss

We read, **“11... [Jesus] 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.**
When Jesus went walking from His home town, a great crowd followed Him.
In the little town of Nain, 5 ½ miles SE of Nazareth of Galilee, Jesus and his crowd meet another crowd coming out to the graveyard.
They were carrying the casket of a young man who had just died--a severe loss to his mother, for she was a widow.

We probably don't get it that this was terrible for this widow, because we either have jobs or are on Social Security.
She had already buried her husband, the family breadwinner, and she did not have the right to inherit anything from him--her only son was the heir.
Now, do you think there were jobs for women in Nain in those days?
She didn't have Social Security--this only son of hers was her social security--without him there was no safety net in ancient Israel for widows and orphans.
God had paid her a visit of judgement: death for her only son. Why, God, why?
How would she survive?--like the widow in the Elijah story she had no hope--she had

suffered a severe loss--she would probably die soon, too.

And that's **Point 2. Because of Her Terrible Loss She Had No Hope**

But we don't want to think about her hopelessness, do we?

We don't want to think about death--we keep that as far from our minds as possible.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss psychiatrist who studied death and grieving, labelled that "being in denial," a state of mind where as soon as the mind starts to think about death, we quickly back away.

I wonder if we are in denial about another kind of death: our towns and communities. I'm sure we saw communities & towns decaying within the last fifty years.

Think about it this way--why do families who own businesses or farms or other wealth want to pass them down to their heirs?

Inheritance law is the foundation of a society built on the right to own private property and the right to pass it on to one's heirs.

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. once said, "Society rests on the death of men."

Society rests on death--meaning, all that goes along with death--funerals and processions and graveyards and passing down property to the next generation--has quite a lot to do with the building of towns & cities & states & nations--how we govern ourselves, live in communities and do things together, like building schools for our kids, having a Dpt. of Trans. to build bridges and highways so that commerce prospers, and we can go to graduations and funerals.

Now think about this--just when cities are removing cemeteries and a sense of community is disintegrating, the American family is falling apart.

Could there be a connection?

We used to have family graves, but so many are moving around the country that it's rarely practical to do that anymore, and with the growing popularity of cremation many remains are scattered to the winds or in the ocean--no markers, no gravestones, no burial societies to take care of the graveyards.

One commentator wrote, "Why **shouldn't** we expect family tradition to weaken at the same time as family graves begin to disappear." [J. Bottum, FIRST THINGS, Ju/Jul '07, p. 18]

What's the point? **Point 3, Out of A Widow's Loss of a Son & Her Loss of Hope, & Those Two Crowds, I See How God Is Paying a Visit to Our Nation.**

God seems to be making a visit of judgement to this country of ours, and while many have have **not** given up hope, many others **have** and are content to be dependent on the gov't, thank you very much.

In the opinion of many our country is never coming back the way it was.

As a nation we may be going the way of ancient Rome which rotted from within.

And if we are not seeing the dangers in this election year, we are part of the problem.

That means: if we do see the dangers and if we have lost hope, like that widow of Nain, we need a second visit from God. So,

Part II. God Visits Us in Grace Through the Person Of His Son.

First, God's Son Jesus Just "Happens" to Show Up at This Procession of Death.

We know of course that funeral processions began not long after Adam & Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden, away from that Tree of Life.

One of their sons, Cain, killed his brother, Abel.

The judgement of God upon Adam & Eve's sin when He visited them in the Garden was, "Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return." Now it already had come true.

However, that judgement of death has been overturned by God's second visit.

In the fulness of time--when God was ready to visit His people--we see God's only Son, Jesus, walking those 5 ½ miles to Nain, and we read, "13 ... when the Lord saw [the widow], 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."

A resurrection at a funeral procession! Out of compassion and love from on High! Who but the One who would die upon a cross and himself come back to life could do this?

Who but this sinless Son of God could perform this miracle of grace and give back this widow's son to her alive?

Second Point: Both of Those Crowds That Day "Got It"--They Got the Message!

Listen, 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

Their first reaction was fear. The Greek word is the simple word **φοβος** which is found in our word, phobia, and it means 'fear, alarm, fright.'

Some commentators say that here it means 'awe' in the presence of the Almighty, but Bauer/Arndt/Gingrich/Danker's lexicon have this verse in the 'terrified' column.

Wouldn't you be? Terrified, I mean? To see a dead man rise up?

And rightly so in the presence of the Deity.

But their fear turned into respectful worship--"they glorified God" by saying two things: (*Nota Bene*) 1) a great prophet has come, and 2) they said "**among us.**"

Those words, "**among us**", are the beginning of faith--to recognize that when the ordinary is set aside by a reversal of nature--a resurrection from the dead--and to see that 'God has visited his people'--that is the beginning of saving faith.

They admitted, they confessed, that **they** were the people God was visiting.

And when they all got over their fright, and the casket was put away, what a welcome back party they must have had!

But that's not all, **Final point: They spread the good news**

17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. (ESV)

They told this astounding story, this good news, even though they surely did not fully understand what was happening

They could not foresee the cross and what it would mean for salvation from death and the grave.

But **we** see--we **have** seen and have believed in God's two visitations--his judgement of death upon every soul that sins, and his visit of grace in Jesus.

One last note: here in ch. 7, v. 13, is the first time in his Gospel Luke calls Jesus "Lord." Let **us** call Him our Lord, and may the Holy Spirit move mightily in us to teach others to call Him their Lord and Savior.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. (Phil. 4:7)