The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

11 September, Anno Domini 2016

St. Luke 7:11-17

Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We don’t need the anniversary of the terrible events of this day fifteen years ago to remind us how real and present a threat death is, though it is a sobering one. Every day, death reaches out and touches our lives. It casts a constant shadow that hounds our every step and we can never seem to escape it. The widow at Nain felt it. The widow at Zarephath felt it. I feel it. You feel it. It knows no rules. There are no safe spaces. Its fingerprints are all over the chaos, anger, gut-wrenching diagnoses, bitter political fighting, mounting stressors, and broken families we find ourselves surrounded by.

Economic status, age, gender - death doesn’t care about any of them. We can develop new drugs and therapies. We can obsess about diets and exercise. Death doesn’t care. It isn’t fair. It isn’t reasonable. It doesn’t ask for permission or if this would be a good time. It simply comes. Sometimes quietly and other times it comes with great violence. And, in the end, we are powerless against it. We can’t stop it. We vainly think we can delay it. But we will never be able to tame it or control it or master it. Even those who seek to by committing suicide are only proving that they are enslaved to it. Some think science will one day unlock the key to living forever. But it won’t because it can’t. The root of death is far beyond the reach of formulas and drugs.

That’s because death isn’t an external enemy to be fought off. It’s not terrorists or guns or disease. Its root lies within us, each and everyone of us. It is the sin that has corrupted all of humanity, the inbred rejection of the God who gives life. The same corruption of will and mind and heart that turned four planes into killing machines fuels our anger, our greed, our pride, our unbelief. It belongs equally to seven-day-old Colt as it does to any adult. And there isn’t any doctor or mystic who can do anything to change that. We are all, every last one of us, conceived in sin. The error of so many is to imagine that we are sinners because we sin, because we make bad choices. The answer in that case is simply to make better choices, to stop sinning. But the reality is much more insidious and inbred. We sin because we ARE sinners. Our hearts are corrupt and turned against God. Every intention of our hearts are sinful from our youth. The reality is that we are dead in our sin and our trespasses from the first moment of our existence. We are separated from God, condemned citizens of the devil’s kingdom. Before we have lips to curse with, hands to steal with, eyes to lust with we are guilty. We are dead. Indeed, we must all confess our powerlessness over death. No matter how society tries to convince us otherwise, everyone of us is making the slow march to the grave which sin has prepared.

But, here today that march has been stopped again. Jesus Christ has put up His hand, filled with the water of the font and stopped Colt’s funeral procession. The voice that cried out into nothingness and created all things has said to another dead sinner, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And at the command of that voice, death has gone fleeing back to the depths of hell from whence it came. There is no debate. There is no consideration. There is no choice to be made. The dead must live. Colt has been made truly alive, given the kind of life that endures beyond physical death. The guilt of sin is gone and death, eternal death, is destroyed. The unclean spirit of sin and death has been cast out to make way for the life-giving Spirit of God. Now Colt, as all the baptized, lives free of death’s shadow because death has no power over him. It can’t because it has no power over his Lord who has taken Colt’s death from him. He has been given a part in the resurrection of the body and the LIFE everlasting.

This is precisely why Jesus walked toward Nain and on toward Jerusalem - to finally, for all people, take away the shadow that has been cast over all nations. Jesus came to swallow up our death, your death, by dying it for you. The death that you fear, the death that threatens us all, has already been died by your Lord. Your Baptism is God’s promise to you that in Christ, you have died. Your sinful Old Adam was plunged under the waters and drowned with all sins and evil desires and up from those same waters rose a new man, filled with the Spirit and Lord of Life. That man will never, can never die. Just as surely as Jesus lives, you who are baptized into Him, also live. Or, do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. So that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Not the kind of life that ends when you draw your last breath. That is the life that only sinful flesh can give. You share in the eternal, unbreakable life of your Savior who has passed through death and broken the seal of the grave. Do not fear death. You don’t die. You will never be separated from God, which is exactly what death is. And even when you do draw your final breath you won’t be dead. Your body will be laid to rest but only for a time. Your soul will go to rest with Christ until that day when your body and the bodies of all the dead will be raised to be made whole again. And all of God’s baptized children will enjoy the eternal life and joy and rest of Christ’s presence.

This day may be long remembered by many for the tragic murder of thousands of our fellow citizens. But this day will be remembered by all here and the whole host of heaven as the day when Colt John Sivumaki’s funeral was stopped and he was given a place among the endless ranks of those drawn out of death and given a share in the life of Jesus Christ. This is the day when Colt was given the new birth of water and the Spirit. This is the day when he was given back to his parents truly alive, rescued from Satan’s clutches, and made an heir of God’s kingdom of mercy and grace.

Dear baptized children of God, do not be afraid of death. It has no power over you. You don’t need to run from it. Death has as little power over you as it has over your resurrected and ascended Lord. There, at the right hand of God, your life is safely hidden with Christ where no terrorist or disease or devil will ever be able to take it away from you.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.