

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
15 September, Anno Domini 2024
St. Luke 7:11-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Children of God,

Why do we need to keep hearing about Jesus? Why did God cause accounts such as the one of the widow at Nain to be recorded in the Bible? It's because we forget. We meet affliction or temptation or persecution. We fall into the snare of the devil and offer our bodies to the works of the flesh. We have to carry parents and spouses and children to the grave and suddenly we begin to doubt and imagine that God is completely different than who He actually is, that He isn't compassionate or loving or merciful. The cross comes and where once we were filled with joy and certainty, we are suddenly filled with sorrow and anxiety. We forget who God actually is and instead begin to wonder if He hasn't deceived us.

At one point, the woman of Nain had the joy of both a husband and a son whom she loved. She was content to have them. That was security. She would be provided for. And if she was anything like you and me she probably didn't give those blessings a second thought. She went about her daily routines, caring for her loved ones, going to the market, laying down next to her husband at night. Until one night, she couldn't. Death took her husband. What wouldn't she give to have him back? The arguments all seemed so stupid and his annoying quirks were suddenly treasured. Life wouldn't ever be the same again. But she still had her son. She could still talk with him. They could comfort one another and miss her husband together. Until one day, he, too, was taken from her. What wouldn't she give now to have her son back? Now, there was no one. No one to talk to. No one to care for. No one to care for her. No one to comfort her. Now what seemed so ordinary and routine, having her husband and her son, was understood to be an extraordinary, gracious gift. But now, that gift was gone. There wasn't just a corpse in that coffin. A woman's hope and joy and life were being carried away to be buried.

We grow accustomed to the Lord's blessings. We expect them. We assume they will be there. We assume our eyes and our hands and our minds will work when we get up in the morning. We assume the sun will rise and set. We assume the refrigerator will keep the milk cold and the AC will keep the house cool. We

assume we will make it safely to work and that our children will be healthy and come home safely from school every day. But what is truly amazing is, in spite of how broken and chaotic this world is, most of the time these things actually do happen. The psalmist is absolutely right when he proclaims that the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. Everywhere we turn, God's mercy and His goodness are on display. Gravity continues to keep us from floating off into space. Water comes out of your faucet to quench your thirst. Your phone pulls up directions to get you around the wreck on 75. And do you give thanks for these things? Do you praise God when your eyes open in the morning and you can see, when your car starts, when you open the pantry and there isn't just food to eat but choices of food and food that has been there for so long it is rotting and needing to be thrown out?

What happens when even one of these things doesn't work like it's supposed to? What is our reaction when our back or our knees begin to hurt? How do we respond when we get a flat tire? How quickly do we lose our temper when our children don't behave like they're supposed to? What if we're not blessed in the way we want - a loving spouse, children who are healthy and well-behaved, a rewarding career, a perfectly healthy mind and body, a fully-funded retirement plan? What if, instead, our spouse is abusive, we aren't able to have children or the ones we have misbehave or suffer a debilitating sickness? What if our every day is overshadowed by the dark clouds of depression or addiction or anxiety? What if we lose our job or can't find one in the first place? What if our spouse is taken from us and then our children?

When anything goes wrong, when anything doesn't work like it's supposed to, suddenly God has failed us, God is no longer to be trusted. His motives and His goodness are doubted. We fill ourselves with anxious worries and fears and justify them. We act as though God is unjust. We demonstrate very clearly that our love and our trust are in the creation not the Creator. "I will trust God so long as I have what I want, as long as I am not asked to suffer, as long as I am not asked to sacrifice and go without. Though I have done nothing to deserve even a single stitch of clothing or a crumb of bread, though He has blessed me infinitely more than I could either desire or deserve, still, I'm not sure He can be trusted. I'm not sure of His gracious will toward me."

This is why every day your ears need to be filled with stories such as the one before us this morning. You need to be reminded that God IS merciful and gracious and will deliver you because every day you see and experience things that Satan will use to convince you of just the opposite. Certainly, as they closed her son's coffin, the woman of Nain had no idea that that very same day he would sit

up from that coffin and speak with her and wrap his arms around her. Without doubt, she knew nothing in that moment but sorrow and hopelessness. She may have even been praying for death for herself simply because it all seemed pointless? Why? Why bother going on? Everything good has been taken from her.

The widow didn't ask Jesus for help. Yet, Jesus, in His mercy, visited this poor widow and was moved by her sorrow and helped her. He didn't chastise her or tell her that she deserved nothing more. He didn't conduct a worthiness interview. He saw her need and met it. That is what he does. That day, she came to know that God is merciful and helps us in our need. Jesus gave her far more than her son. He revealed to her God's mercy and compassion. She knew God to be the God who overcomes and destroys death. He is the Savior who atones for sin. He is the God who does not deal with us according to our sin, giving us nothing but what we deserve. He is the God who causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall. He gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater. He is the God who does far more than simply giving you what is easy. He gives you what is good. He gives you His dear Son to bear your sin in His flesh and to free all men from our slavery to death. He gives you eternal life. He gives you crosses and afflictions to discipline and train you. He gives you the promise of the resurrection from the dead. He gives you the promise that your sin has been blotted out, covered by His Blood in the waters of Holy Baptism. He gives you bread and wine, His Body and His Blood, promising that by these the forgiveness He obtained on Calvary is yours today.

God sees your sorrows, your heartaches, your failures, your frustrations, and your losses. He has heard your bitter cries of contrition. He has seen the tears stream down your face. He has beheld the wicked rise up against you and try to overthrow you and bring you into despair. And He has done the one and only thing that can bring hope and peace into the midst of the darkness and brokenness of this world. He has died and risen from the dead, counting all of your sins against His beloved Son and thereby taking from Satan the only really weapon he had against you. This is the reality in which your Baptism has placed you and remains your so long as you remain Baptized. Whether it is an overwhelming tragedy or the slow drip of endless struggle and frustration or both, you remain a forgiven child of God the Father who, one day, will open your coffin and call you forth from the dead to inherit His gracious kingdom. Nothing will change that. No devil. No grave. No sickness or earthly suffering of any kind.

This is the God that we all need held before us daily, constantly so that our hearts are not overwhelmed by what we see or experience or feel. God will not change

His mind about you. He will not take back His promises. If He sees fit to lay a cross upon you and to allow you to suffer the loss of earthly things, it is so that you are reminded of the reality that all earthly things are fleeting and passing away and cannot save you any more than they can save themselves. He gently chides so that your eyes are drawn to eternal things, His Word and the salvation that He has prepared for you, so that your heart is fixed upon Him, who will never pass away, who will never deceive you, who will never fail you or give you other than what is good.

Children of God, take a moment and look around you. Each and every person you see in this room knows real suffering. You are not alone. We are all bearing crosses, carrying coffins, wrestling against weak flesh. We are all in need of mercy from our Lord and from one another. Some days the load is heavier than others and we will not bear it gracefully. Some days we will speak and act in ways that are less than loving, patient, gentle, or respectful. No one is immune. We need help. We are weak. We need one another's prayers. We need one another's encouragement in Christ. We need one another's tears. We need one another's compassion. We need one another's forgiveness. As those who have received both the temporal and eternal goodness and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us be as compassionate and patient with one another and with all our neighbors. Just as we need for ourselves, let us assume the very best, quickly and gladly cover one another's sins and mistakes, be quick to help, slow to anger, zealous in humility. Let us eagerly share our earthly mammon and even more eagerly share the eternal riches with all who are in need.

God is merciful. God is filled with compassion for you. Every good and perfect gift that you need will be given to you. You do not need to doubt it. Your Lord is the very same Lord who brought aid and comfort to the widow at Nain. He will and has done nothing less for you. Your sorrow will not endure forever. It may be that your deliverance is today. It may be years from now. But you will be delivered. You do not need to doubt that. And you have the promise that your suffering will actually be used to bless you. You don't see it now, but you have the sure promise of Jesus who hung upon the cross, who washed you in Baptism, and who gives His Body and Blood so that you may not doubt but firmly believe that one day your tears of sadness will be turned into eternal shouts of joy. Keep hearing about this, the only, Jesus. Keep telling your children and your neighbor about the God who is mercy and who has compassion on sinners. God grant that each day you may know again this Jesus who has had compassion on you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.