

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 7:11-17

5 October, Anno Domini 2025

Beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ,

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

Last week, our Lord warned us against spending our lives serving mammon. It is truly futile and foolish to worry and chase after these things because they neither care about you nor are they able to help you.

Today, perhaps in the most visceral way possible, Jesus drives the same point home with the intent of teaching us how we are to think of Him, the only true God. And the picture of Himself that He puts before us stands in the sharpest contrast to the worthless and tyrannical idols that so often sit on the thrones of our hearts. You can almost hear the widow of Nain, having received her son back from death, literally, singing the words of the Introit appointed for this Sunday: “For great is Your steadfast love toward me; You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.” (Psalm 86:13)

But this poor woman of Nain, earlier bereaved of her husband, now is having to tread the same bitter steps again to the grave, this time to bury her dear and only son who had been a source of comfort to her in her earlier sorrow. Who would comfort her now? Who would care for her and protect her now? And in hours of such deep anguish, it is to be expected that the first question is going to be “Why? Why was such a bitter sorrow allowed to fall upon me?” And because we either don’t know or don’t believe what God has said in the Scriptures, we begin to assume that such things can only come about because God is angry and takes pleasure in our sorrow because He doesn’t really care for us. In the words of the widow of Zarephath “You have come to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” (1 Kings 17:18)

But such accusations against God aren’t rooted in reality. They are instead rooted in the idolatry of our hearts and the presumption that anything we have comes anywhere but from the merciful hand of God. And, therefore, the fact that we have things leads us to believe that we have a right to those things and that apart from them, there isn’t anything good.

Repent. The truth of the matter is that nothing is good except God. Not health. Not

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wealth. Not academic titles and credentials. Not your children. Not your spouse. Not intelligence. Not you. All of these and every other last thing that we have, including our very existence, are nothing more than gifts of God's abundant and underserved mercy. What did you do to merit being conceived in your mother's womb, protected for nine months while God wonderfully knit you together? What did you do to merit the rising of the sun or the falling of the rain? What did you do to merit the forgiving and life-giving waters of Holy Baptism? What did you do to deserve the incarnation of the Son of God and His atoning death that conquered death, opened your grave, and tore the veil that separated you from God?

How relatively quick we are to give God praise when we narrowly escape death or when we succeed against the odds or when we suddenly come into money. But rarely if ever do we take notice of the fact that God is constantly showering upon us His care and provision purely out of His own steadfast love and compassion. And yet, how quick we are to complain when any one of those things we take for granted as though they are owed to us, is taken away. When we fall and break a bone and suddenly can't walk, now do we think about the great mercy of being able to enjoy full use of both our legs. Or, like the widows of Zarephath and Nain, how we take for granted the great and merciful gifts of our spouses and children, complaining about this, that, or the other thing, begrudging their quirks and weaknesses, hesitating to make the sacrifices to give them the most important things, until suddenly they are taken from us. Then suddenly we are acutely aware of the gracious blessing they were. Then suddenly we are willing to have spared no expense and suffered any inconvenience to give them true, eternal, good things. If only we could have them back. So, let us give thanks to God and do those things now rather than wait until we can't.

Perhaps you know the bitter pain of these two women. Perhaps you know a different pain. Or perhaps, such bitterness has not yet befallen you. Whichever describes you, know that the Holy Spirit has recorded these events as examples for our instruction and comfort.

First, consider the great depth of sorrow and perhaps even hopelessness the widow of Nain was enduring. The last thing she even considered in that moment as they left the gates of the city behind was receiving her son back. He was dead. You can't undo that. Reason does not think of the resurrection, that the dead can and will live again, nor that those who die in Christ, aren't even dead. Even Martha's understanding of life, death, and resurrection was incomplete because she didn't consider the full power of God. She, at the death of her brother Lazarus, said "Sure, Jesus, he'll rise on the Last Day. But he's dead now. There's nothing left to

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do but wait. Maybe if you'd been here sooner, you could have healed him, but that ship has sailed."

It was precisely into this hour of anguish and despair that Jesus approached the funeral procession from Nain. This was no coincidence. Jesus intended this encounter not only for this woman and her son, but for you as well. Jesus comes in compassion. He, the God of heaven and earth, Creator of all things, is moved to His very core at this woman's tears and cries. He doesn't simply think "How sad for her." He is not cold noting simply "the wages of sin is death." Christ hears and sees this woman's agony and knows it in His own person. His own flesh aches. He too hates death. He too is saddened that a woman has to bury both her husband and her son. He cares deeply about this woman. And in His compassion, He met this procession of death head on and said something that probably strikes us as unfeeling and bizarre - "Do not weep." What could He mean by those words except "I, the Lord your God, have heard your lament and I have come to help you. I am not simply going to comfort you and speak of a future hope. I am going to show you both the character and the power of God and the true nature of my work and the purpose of my incarnation. I am going to show you that I am He who is life and who will overcome and swallow up death. Your son's death, is the very means by which you will know that I am gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. But your heart had to know this sorrow first so that you could see Me and your need for Me."

By nature, we assume, like the disciples did in regard to the man born blind, that such troubles come because someone is at fault and God is meeting out punishment. But this is wrong. Jesus said of that man that it was so that "the works of God might be displayed in him." The man's blindness and subsequent healing was another vehicle by which God's merciful character and power over sin and death were revealed not only to that man in that moment, but to you and to millions who have read and heard what Jesus did for this man ever since. Thus, by making these events known to you, God is telling you and showing you who He is, the full power at His disposal to help you, and His compassion for all who are suffering under the ravages of sin.

And do not think for even a moment that Jesus helped this woman because of some quality or faith in her. She hadn't asked for a resurrection. Scripture makes no mention of her faith before or after. She was not more pious or deserving than any other woman who had lost her son. By these events you are to see that God acts for our good solely out of His compassion and mercy. The Lord Jesus knows your need better than you do and knows perfectly how to meet that need in a way that

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you look to the Giver and not to the gift. While this dear woman received her son back with great joy, that joy was far exceeded by knowing God to be merciful and compassionate, not generically or abstractly, but toward HER and that His compassion flowed from Himself, not her worthiness.

Secondly, the raising of this young man is filled with comfort because it is a demonstration that Jesus has power even to undo death itself. This is His work and purpose, to defeat death and rob the grave and hell itself of you by allowing the grave and hell to have Him instead. And they tried. But they couldn't hold Him because He had no sin of His own and therefore He stood in as your substitute and paid for your sin. The debt is settled in full and you are free because in Holy Baptism you have been made an heir with Christ, sons of the Most High God.

By raising this man from the dead, Christ Jesus has affirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt that which you and the whole Christian Church confess ever week in the Divine Service - faith, confidence in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. On the Last Day the body that now sits in these pews, the bodies of the saints that now rest in the cemetery gardens, these flesh, blood, and bone bodies will be caught up in the resurrection. All who had already closed their eyes in faith will enjoy the eternal reunion of their body and soul and together with those who were left alive at the Lord's coming will be instantly changed - the mortal will put on immortality, the perishable will be made imperishable, that which was filled with dishonor will be raised in glory. The sin and death that now plague our bodies will be destroyed and put away from us for all eternity. Never again will there be sorrow. Never again will there be pain. Never again will there be coffins or funerals or procession to graves.

But the compassion and goodness and loving kindness of God are not only things you will benefit from some time in the distant future. Absolutely not! The widow of Nain was only one example of Christ helping and delivering now in the time of this mortal life. Don't hear of these glorious works of God and imagine "If only I could receive such mercy." Open your eyes! Behold the endless stream of mercy that came flowing out of the pierced side of Jesus and flows now to you. He has given you a kingdom and name. He feeds you with the true bread which came down from heaven - His own Flesh. He daily and richly forgives all your sins. He has settled you in the home of the Christian Church and surrounded you with these dear saints to love and support you and help you carry your burdens. He daily surrounds you with His holy angels to watch over you and keep you from stumbling. He shields you from the relentless hail of the devil's fiery arrows by which the devil would destroy you and draw you back into death. He give you food and

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drink, clothing and shoes, sunshine and rain, the farmer's fruitful field, and an uncountable host of other gracious gifts every day because He is a gracious God who attends to your every need.

To know God in this way, as He has revealed Himself in Christ as compassionate and filled with help for both body and soul, is to have true and abiding peace. For if this God is your god, what do you have to fear or worry about? His Word has the power to raise the dead back to life. What need do you have that He cannot and will not meet? What sin have you committed that His Blood cannot and did not atone for?

Beloved of God, behold the great love and compassion of Jesus for the widow of Nain and know for certain that He has the same love and compassion for you. And if raising your loved one from the dead is best, He most certainly can and will do just that. The sorrows that you now endure are not signs of His wrath. Instead, like the death of the young man, they have been graciously granted to you as the means through which the Lord will draw you to Himself and show you His love and compassion for you. He knows how and will do through these trials far more and better than any of us know how to ask or even think.

May God the Holy Spirit grant that this Word which He has proclaimed in your hearing this day grant you "strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ" which is for you. For it is this love that has stopped your march to eternal death and raised you to eternal life in both body and soul.

To God alone be all glory, honor, praise, and might for His abundant mercy and compassion.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.