

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 7:11-17
20 September, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved of God,

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

Even in our sanitized, modern society which tries desperately to hide, ignore, or clean up death (except in “entertainment”), every day, death reaches out and touches our lives reminding us of its presence. 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 Cain against Abel fuels our anger, our greed, our pride, our unbelief. It belongs equally to the infant 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, and absolved you of all your sins. The voice that cried out into nothingness and created all things has said 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. In Baptism, you have 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 the baptized, live free of death's shadow because death has no power over you. It can't because it has no power over your Lord who has taken your death from you. You have 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? And what is the consequence of that? What does that mean for you? It means that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, you too may live a new life. Not the kind of life that ends when you draw your last breath.

Many members. One body united in Christ.

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.

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 disease or devil or death will ever be able to take it away from you.

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.