

Text: John 7:11-17

Jesus Doesn't Hesitate to Show His Hand

Isn't it amazing that the Gospel reading for the first regular Pentecost Sunday is this one. Here we have Jesus as described by Luke tipping his hand to show all the world what his plan was for the fate of all mankind—raising them from death. Jesus didn't hesitate to show his hand and reveal to all who were willing to accept it that he had come to conquer death. Luke tells this story of Jesus' encounter with the widow of Nain and the raising of her son from death already in the seventh chapter. And in the eighth he will tell about Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from death. Mark is the only other evangelist who relates how Jesus raised Jairus' daughter and he does it in the fifth chapter but this is already almost a third of the way into his book while Luke relates this story after only a little over a fourth of his book is completed. Matthew has neither incident recorded and John waits until over half way through his gospel before telling about Jesus raising Lazarus.

The story was once told by a pastor to colleagues about a young man fresh out of seminary. While conducting his first grave-side service, he stepped backwards, lost balance and somehow ended up on top of the casket which, in turn, went down into the grave under his weight. The teller of the story then proceeded accompanied by the laughter of others: "now, there is no graceful recovery from that! Unless, of course, you happen to bring the deceased back up with you."

Luke tells us that Jesus had compassion on a widow who was in distress. This poor woman was about to bury her only son, but instead he resuscitates him and brings him back from the dead. Jesus stops the hearse, touches the coffin and says: "Young man, I say to you, rise!" Now, this could potentially have been the most embarrassing moment of Jesus' ministry, had the body of the boy not responded. But of course, the boy did get up.

Luke mentions that the mourners were overcome with fear and that certainly sounds real. Imagine if you would witness something like this at a funeral you attend; imagine the corpse would start twitching, then sit up and start walking around. Joy would only set in after the initial shock. There are only few things creepier than the thought of a casket opening and a dead person coming back to life. This is the stuff that horror flicks are made of.

What does this story teach us? Well, for one this account shows how God's providence works. God must have made this meeting between Jesus and his entourage and this widow's grieving process come to pass. And it comes at a moment of great distress and human suffering in the life of a widow. It reveals God's heart, God's compassion, love and care for very common and ordinary people.

Widows in first-century Judea were women on the margin of society. Without a social security system in place, these people relied on their extended families for support which was often lacking due to the overall poverty of the common population. Again and again, we hear of poor widows like the one Elijah encountered at Zarephath and in the New Testament widows like the one who gave her "mite" to the temple treasury.

We also see the heart of Jesus revealed so beautifully here. Jesus apparently knew nothing about the details of this death or about the mourning woman. He was so gripped with compassion and love toward this woman that he spontaneously decided to intervene in a dramatic way.

He first comforts the woman and then he heals her son. The first words out of his mouth are: “do not weep.” Do not weep. These powerful yet simple words are all he says. When Jesus said, “do not weep” he knew that there would no longer be a reason to weep. Jesus’ words, “do not weep” also remind me of the question Jesus asked Mary Magdalene shortly after he rose from the dead. He asked her “why do you weep?” When Jesus asked this question, he was saying: you don’t have any reason to weep. I have removed the cause for your pain and mourning.

In the Greek Luke uses the word *splogchnon* to describe Jesus “compassion.” This is the same word that is used for entrails and refers to a compassion that comes so deeply from within. It comes from one’s innermost feelings, from literally “the pit of the stomach.”

I’m sure you have experienced this sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach or your “entrails” when you heard really shocking news, perhaps about the illness or death of a loved one? Well that’s the feeling Jesus experienced. Jesus saw her for the first time and yet he feels for her loss like she was one of his own family members. That’s the compassion of Jesus. A divine compassion like only God can have and here it is for a perfect “stranger.”

Then there’s the message Jesus intends this miracle to bring to the people who witnessed it. Jesus has come to bring healing, salvation and everlasting life to his people. He is exercising the same power that he would show when he died on the cross to win our forgiveness and when he rose from the dead as the first fruits of the resurrection. Here the people see the true power of God to regenerate that which is dead, our hearts buried in sin and dead in trespasses. Here we see the power of God to bring us from sin to forgiveness, from death to life, from the brink of destruction to the bright light of salvation and forgiveness and peace. One young man was raised from the dead but the message is clear that he is only a type of the new life we have by faith in the risen redeemer.

The reaction of the people shows that his message was heard and believed. The text says that the people of the village glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" The people did NOT say: “God has looked favorably on his daughter, the widow and her son.” The people knew that this compassion, this love, this favor was extended to all of them. They instinctively knew that this was true divine love and compassion and they knew that Jesus would have helped any of them in a similar situation.

This morning, we should join in with the people at Nain. We should praise God, for his favor and his compassion which is also extended to each one of us. The good news is that to Jesus all and any of us are family. He cares deeply for you and me and he cannot stand to see us suffering, sad or depressed. He feels our pain and he wants to help us.

Are there any of us here this morning who are mourning, saddened, or suffering? Do you have a family member suffering with cancer? Do you know someone who is out of work and has no prospects for a job? Or are you the one with the cancer or the one who is out of work? The message Jesus wants you and all of us to hear is that he is with us in our pain and suffering. And he has the power to bring us peace and joy in the midst of suffering. Don’t give up; you came to the right place this morning. Receive the encouragement he brings by turning to his cross for the peace that passes all

understanding. He has saved you and will raise you to life again in the eternity he has guaranteed by his own suffering death and resurrection. He is the Lord and will bring us all that we need to comfort our souls for he has compassion and has lavished us with his love.