

Pastor Gregory Paul Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
2/27/2008, Midweek Lent 3
Luke 7:11-17

PRAYER OF THE DAY (The Third Week of Lent)

Eternal Lord, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your Word and obey it, so that we become instruments of your redeeming love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

HOLY GOSPEL.....Luke 7:11-17, KJV

And it came to pass the day after [that is, the day after the cure of the centurion's servant], that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. ¹²Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. ¹³And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. ¹⁴And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. ¹⁵And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. ¹⁶And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. ¹⁷And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.

LBW 327

Rock of Ages

SERMON

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“And it came to pass,” our text says. It came to pass that Jesus entered a city called Nain and “when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” We live in a world of broken hearts, as one of the dear old commentators on this story put it.(William Barclay, 1956)

There are oceans of sadness in that word “widow,” for example. Perhaps only the woman herself can know the depths of her experience — both the gratitude she might feel for her departed husband and sorrow at his leaving her. Kathryn Weidmann, for example, who is so much on our minds these days as she recovers from her heart valve surgery, still speaks with obvious love for her husband Carl, though that good man departed this world and entered into the nearer presence of Christ a good long while ago now, before my time began here at Immanuel.

Well, Kathryn is still blessed to have her children, Tim, Fred, and Carlynn, but this widow in this evening's story had only her one son, and now he is dead. What devastation of soul for this woman, to be left so alone in the world. She goes in the procession. Doubtless she is there, walking along with her son's body, but who would be surprised to hear that the funeral procession is rather a blur for her. She walks in the

procession, but as if she is not there, so unready and unwilling she is to have lost her son. She moves her feet along, one after another, but her heart is elsewhere, back in happier times.

He was to have been the help and comfort of her golden years, as he was able. After his day's work, maybe he would stop by on his way home. On the Sabbath day, not only would he have gone to synagogue, but also he would have celebrated the Sabbath in the good old fashioned way of visiting friends and family, including dear old Mom. He could have had his own wife and children — grandchildren to her to have gladdened her old age. But now he is gone, and life looks much more grim to her.

“And it came to pass,” our text says. It came to pass as if it were a happenstance: it came to pass that Jesus walked by. Preachers of old have paused before that point and pondered it. Suppose Jesus had walked into that town half an hour earlier or half an hour later. It might have been, then, that the path of Jesus would not have crossed that of the funeral procession, and so the poor widow would not have received back her son. What a sorrow that would have been!

But the truth is, the passing by of Jesus is never a mere happenstance. His presence is always fit and makes whatever time it is a good time.

Take this evening, for example. You are here, and so is Jesus — this same Jesus from yesteryear who touched the dead young man and brought him back to life. I do not know the ins and outs of your being here this evening, but I think it is no accident that you are here, and, in any case, Jesus has been here waiting for you.

As Jesus was yesterday, so he is today and ever will be: He is one who is willing to lift up those who are dead.

In your various ways, you might be among them. You might be the young man or the young woman on the bier needing to be touched by Jesus. That is why it is so good that Jesus is here this evening. You could be dead in various ways: You might be dead tired. Your heart might be broken and your emotions played out. Or you might be dead in your sins. Let's think on these things a bit.

First off, about being dead tired, Jesus himself knew what it is to be tired. Just last Sunday, our Gospel story about the woman at the well mentioned in passing that Jesus was wearied by his walking:

Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.(John 4:6, KJV)

Furthermore, one of the most beautiful promises of Jesus is phrased in answer to the fact that we become weary:

²⁸Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.(Matthew 11:28-30, KJV)

Well, about this human reality of weariness, I note that you have made a good beginning on getting some rest. You have made a good beginning in the simple, practical sense that you have made your way here to church. It is the middle of the work week, you could be spending your time in many ways, including those ways that obscure your fatigue, but this is an orderly and Christian way to spend some time: You have gathered

with Jesus and some of his people in the middle of the week. You have gathered with the One whose stated goal is that you should come unto him and get some rest. Of course, your labors still beckon and your strength is still limited, and yet I think that many a Christian could testify that life became calmer and somehow better as they drew nearer to Jesus. It is his desire for you.

Second, some of you might have emotional systems that are nearly numb. *You* are not dead, but *your heart* seems dead. Long years of disappointment might have taken their toll on you. Or maybe some recent shock has left your emotions in a blur, as I imagine the case for the widow in this evening's story as she walks along beside the bier of her son.

About this, let me hasten to tell you something about our God that none of the ancient Greeks would think becoming of a proper god: that is, Jesus cares about the heartaches of others. He is not impassive. He is not unmoved by the sorrows of others. He sees the widow in this evening's story, for example, and the text says that he is moved by the sight:

¹³And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her,
Weep not.

That word there, "compassion," in Greek means "to be moved as to one's bowels," which were thought to be the very seat of love and pity. That is, when Jesus beheld the widow, he was stirred to his very depths. The One who meets us in the Blessed Sacrament this evening is One who knows all about broken hearts, and he has pity on the broken-hearted. Surely, one day, in the nick of time and for all eternity, he will bring us joy again.

And finally, there is always the possibility for those who gather around Jesus that they are dead in their sins — dead in their trespasses, as St. Paul puts it:

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;(Ephesians 2:1, KJV)

Christian though you might be, some corner of your soul might be dead in sin. Other people might not be able to reach you when it comes to that point. They might call to you as if calling to a brick wall. You simply will not heed the call to give up your alcohol, give up your gluttony, give up your fierce temper.

But you could! Jesus could lead you from your death into life. Just as he reached out and touched the bier of the dead young man, so he is willing to reach out and touch any deadness in your souls. Indeed, some part of your heart might be frostbitten and no longer capable of feeling anything, yet that too you can offer to Jesus and he can touch you and make you warm again.

Altogether, this midweek Lent series is about the touch of Jesus. Jesus is willing to reach out and touch the drowning man, touch the leper, touch the dead man. And this same Jesus is present in this small gathering, glad to reach out and touch you and me too. Let him lead us into some miracle of life in his name, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.