

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinityⁱⁱ

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the seventeenth Chapter of the First Book of the Kings, commonly called the Third Book of the Kings.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath [**ZARE-eh-fath**], which belongeth to Zidon [**ZYE-dunn**], and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

“...

“And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

“And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.^{iv}

“And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now

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. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. . And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And 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. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*And it came to pass the day after, that Jesus went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now 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. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.*”^v In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Can you imagine the headlines from an event such as this today? “Wandering preacher heals dead man,” or perhaps, “Jesus returns speech to formerly dead man,” or even in one of the tabloids, “Jesus practicing medicine without a license!”

Many of the events in Scripture seem foreign to us today, lost in a time shrouded by the mists of the past. But these events are as real and vital today as they were some two thousand-plus years ago.

Consider: Nain was a small town located about ten miles southeast of Nazareth. Jesus was wandering the area, coming from Capernaum, where He had healed the centurion's slave.^{vi} The very next day, as He approached Nain, He saw a funeral procession coming out of the town.

That this procession was coming out of town was not unusual, as by Jewish custom, the dead were buried outside of town. Nor would it be unusual to see such a thing today. Indeed, how many of us have pulled over at the side of the road to show our respect as a funeral procession winds its way to the gravesite?

In this case, the deceased was a young man, although we do not know how he died. With Jesus were His Apostles, as well as a crowd of followers, some from Capernaum [**kuh-PURR-nuh-umm**], who wished to see if He would do further miracles or otherwise to learn from Him. With the dead man were his mother—a widow burying her only son, we are told—and many people of the town, who grieved with the widow and tried to comfort her in her loss. Now, if she was a widow, she had already lost her primary means of support, and the loss of her son would likely render her destitute and at the mercy of the support of others. Thus, she had every reason to grieve even the more at her double loss.

Now He could have passed by with perhaps only a prayer, or a brief kind word. He could have even perhaps simply passed by with no comment. But that was not the way of our Lord.

Instead, our Lord's response to this sight and the grief of the widow was as it always was: compassion. He was moved by her tears, by her loss, and by the terrible grief caused by her only son's passing. But His compassion was not just a vague feeling of sorrow or empathy; it was a determination to help those in need.

So Jesus saw the widow in grief and had compassion and went to her and said two simple words: “*Weep not.*”^{vii} These two words held so much more than just telling her not to cry. In their pure simplicity and power they also held the promise of help, of healing. She did not have to ask for Jesus' help; He offered it freely because of His compassion for her in her sorrow.

Jesus did not tell people not to grieve unless He was to take away their cause for grieving. Our Lord was a man of action and of intense interaction with people. Those who dealt with Him always seemed to know that Jesus was not an ordinary man, but had amazing wisdom and power, even if they did not understand whence that power came.

Then He approached the bed upon which the dead man was being carried and touched it. The bearers of the bier stood still, awaiting what would happen next. We can imagine that everyone present probably stopped and held their collective breath; time itself must have seemed to have stopped for a moment. What would Jesus do? He had told the widow, “*Weep not*” but what would He do to relieve her grief?

Surely some of these people had heard rumors and stories of what this Jesus had done. Healings, wise words and mighty miracles had been attributed to Him. What might He do now?

Jesus spoke again: “*Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.*”^{viii} A very simple command, a command from God. Such a command cannot be ignored, or overlooked, or disobeyed.

The young man who was dead sat up and began to speak. Clearly, he was returned from death to life. This was our Lord’s answer to the widow’s grief. Her precious only son was returned to her. Jesus, we are told, “*delivered him to his mother.*”^{ix}

Any parent can tell you that this kind of gift is beyond imagination and beyond understanding. Imagine for a moment if you were actually in one of those funeral processions, winding your sad way to the graveyard, when a passing minister stopped the procession, peered in the window of the limousine carrying the bereaved, and said, “*Weep not.*”

More, imagine that next the minister opened the back of the hearse and touched the coffin, and ordered the deceased to arise! How would you respond? Would you be afraid to see the dead actually sit up and speak?

The crowd which witnessed this miracle was afraid and it spread throughout the region word of what had happened. They praised God,

the Scripture says, concluding that *“A great prophet is risen up among us,”* and *“God hath visited His people.”*^x

The young man was not able to sit up of his own, for he was dead. He needed God to restore his life. No more can the sinner achieve forgiveness without God. We may, however, ask for forgiveness until that time of our death. We are reliant utterly upon God for our forgiveness and salvation.

Let's all be thankful that our Lord is every bit as ready to help us as He was to help the poor widow of Nain. If we but call upon Him, He stands ready always to stop our procession to death to intercede and give us life eternal.

His actions as reported today might not have gotten headlines the way they would were He walking earth with us today, but they were and are every bit as real and as saving, regardless of when they occurred, back then or now.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, stand with us as Thou hast promised, in time of grief, sorrow and tribulation. Give to us Thy guiding love, kindness and forgiveness. Save us from ourselves and our sins through Thy everlasting mercy. Raise our souls, dead through sin, into life eternal as we give our lives over to You. This we ask of thy everlasting mercy. Amen.

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW^{xi}
September 23, 2012

ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ *I Kings 17:8-9, 17-24 (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Luke 7:11-17 (KJV).*

^v *St. Luke 7:11-15 (NIV).*

^{vi} *St. Luke 7:1-10 (NIV).*

^{vii} *St. Luke 7:13 (NIV).*

^{viii} *St. Luke 7:14 (NIV).*

^{ix} *St. Luke 7:15 (NIV).*

^x *St. Luke 7:16 (NIV).* ^x *This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.*

^x *I Kings 17:8-9, 17-24 (KJV).*

^x *St. Luke 7:11-17 (KJV).*

^x *St. Luke 7:11-15 (NIV).*

^x *St. Luke 7:1-10 (NIV).*

^x *St. Luke 7:13 (NIV)*

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