

Proper 5 Year C  
St. Luke 7:11-17  
June 5, 2016  
St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## Don't You Just Wish?

*"When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother."*

In the midst of one of those hopeless situations, when you have no one else and nothing else to turn to except for God, our last and only hope, don't you just wish things could be different?

This past week a friend of mine has been dying from lung cancer. He died last night. He was only 57 years old. Everything had been going really well for him in his life: a new job and a new girlfriend. He was finally putting his life together when the diagnosis came down the pike. It seems horribly unfair. And when I hear the story of the widow of Nain, losing her only son, I think about what God did for this poor woman. And I just wish God could do this right now. I have wished this wish more than a few times in the face of what seemed like an apparent injustice during my life and ministry.

*Fear not. Do not cry. All will be well, but for a time, we must part. Then we will be together again. Even if a loved one were raised from the dead it would only be temporary, a brief extension of this mortal existence, because we must all come to that point of*

leaving. Perhaps we should concern ourselves as Christians more with *leaving well*.

Nain is a small-untouched village in Israel. This story appears only once in the Gospels, here in Luke this morning, and only once in the three year cycle of readings in church. And so therefore, *Nain* is not a major tourist stop or a site to exploit for a touristy development. If you visit the village today, it looks pretty much as it did when Jesus visited in the first century, so it is one of the few places where you can get a sense of what life was like back then.

The fact that it is unchanged says something to us. You can almost envision the sad procession out of the village that day to bury the only son of a woman who has already lost her husband. How much grief must that woman have borne? Her neighbors and friends gather around her to support her and grieve with her. *She is not alone.*

What is unchanged is this walk, which we all must make, when we too, will lose a loved one. It is hard enough to lose a parent, a spouse or a friend, but the loss of a child cuts deeply into our hearts. Death presents us with a change that cannot be undone. A door appears to be closed. Our *hope* is that this parting is but a temporary one, and that someday, when it is our time to leave, we will be reunited in a way that is much closer than anything this world could have ever offered us.

**Nain** has been unchanged pretty much for some 2,000 plus years. Is there anything else unchanged since then? What is unchanged is God's love for us, despite the poignant moments in our lives, which remind us of our mortality. But we like to forget that one. We live in a blissful denial about death, sometimes right up to our last moments on this earth. By this way of thinking, death casts

no shadow over our lives, and we remain untouched and unchanged, or so we suppose. The constant, though, is the love of God, always available to us, closer than our hearts beating inside of us. That love is the magic, the miracle, which when it touches us can transform a life of darkness and death into a new one filled with life and light.

Jesus simply touches the bier on which they carry the now dead young man. He touches it. He touches everyone's lives gathered there who are grieving the loss of her son. "*In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for comfort, but of thee, O Lord,*" our burial office liturgy opens with this anthem at the grave. In the midst of our sorrows, *God touches us to relieve our sorrow and heal our pain of loss. God grants us hope in the midst of hopelessness, light in the midst of darkness, life in the midst of death.*

In our darkest hours, we are not alone. We are not without comfort. The God who created us is there. God loves us, and wants us to be with him. God will comfort us and help lift the cloak of sadness and grief. In such times we are more likely to be open to trusting God and placing ourselves in God's loving care. And when we open our hearts to God, God enters in and touches each of us individually in a way that we know the power of love truly heals and that this pain of grief will pass. The touch of God, once felt, brings us peace. We may always miss a loved one, but the power of trusting God means that we can resurrect them in our hearts.

Three times Jesus raises someone from death: First, he raises the only son of the widow of Nain in today's Gospel passage. Next, it is Jairus's daughter, [Luke 8:41-42; 49-56] again the grief and sadness are over the loss of a child. Telling them she is only sleeping, he tries to comfort the family: "*Meanwhile, all the*

people were wailing and mourning for her. 'Stop wailing,' Jesus said. '**She is not dead but asleep.**' They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, '**My child, get up!**' Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened."

And finally, he raises Lazarus while on his way to Jerusalem to take up his cross for us [John 11:1-43]. The passage is unique in that it has the shortest and one of the most powerful sentences in the scriptures, describing Jesus' response to the loss of his dear friend and the painful grief of his family left behind: "**Jesus wept.**" This scene illustrates that God feels loss too, and can empathize with us. God is not without feelings and emotion. God understands us and has compassion upon us. The tally of resurrection miracles? Two children and a close friend. These are some of the hardest deaths and losses to take. God intervenes here while he walks the earth. We hear the prayer falling off our lips: *don't you just wish God could resurrect my loved one too?*

But would it matter? Human life is a mortal life while on this earth in these casings for our souls we call bodies. Any miracle that would restore mortal life would be temporary. Eventually there is a reckoning, a time for all of us to leave this existence, and as we as Christians hope and believe, move on to the next one. The two children and Lazarus have long ago left this life on earth, despite the miracle of renewed life given them. They live today, and in a real way, not merely in the words of scripture.

To what end did God perform these miracles? Jesus demonstrated two things in performing these resurrection miracles: 1.) **the power** of God vested in the person Jesus; and 2.) **the compassion** of God in ministering to our pain and loss.

First, we learn the potential power God possesses. God is the creator, sustainer and preserver of life. Life comes from God and is in God. Life cannot be sustained apart from God. It is a great miracle that we make it through each night. It is a miracle that we awaken in the morning. It is a miracle that we make it through the day unscathed. We ought to be grateful if we can open our eyes and our hearts to appreciate these miracles.

Second, we learn from meditating on the scriptures about these three incidents that God is a God of compassion and caring, and he does not willfully seek to inflict pain and suffering upon us. We can have great comfort and peace in this knowledge.

Today, the bishops and leaders of our church have asked us to pray for an end to gun violence. It is not inappropriate that as we think about the loss of the widow of Nain this morning, that we think also on the many mothers and widows who have lost children to gun violence in this country. This past Thursday, many wore orange colored garments to mark this movement in response to the many victims of gun violence in our midst. Bishop Douglas wrote this explanation for the clergy this past week:

*“The Wear Orange movement began in Chicago to honor Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year-old honor student who was shot to death in January 2012, two weeks after marching in President Obama’s second inaugural parade. Her friends, searching for a way to mark their loss, asked their friends to wear orange in Hadiya’s honor. Orange is the color hunters wear so they will be seen and not shot. From that gesture, a movement was born. Hadiya would have been 19 this June 2, and in her honor, millions of Americans will wear orange to demonstrate our commitment to reducing gun violence. The skyline of her hometown and public buildings in other cities will be lit with orange light. The following Sunday, some clergy will wear orange stoles as they preach about preventing gun violence.”*

Any loss that is avoidable is tragic. Guns have already proliferated to a point where there are far more of them than there are people in this country, and in this state. It is likely too late to "get the guns back." They are out there. Gun violence is only one part of a culture of violence in which we live in this country, where we have learned that violence is the way to resolve problems, whether on the playground, or in television and movies, or in some of our families where verbal and physical violence dominates interpersonal and intimate relationships; or in our communities where we confront crime or in our foreign policy with other nations. Violence has become pervasive and it is our **go to** answer for many problems.

We need to unlearn violence and relearn the way of Peace. Jesus teaches us the way of peace. We, you and I, are the ministers of God's peace in the world. We must spread that peace to every corner of our lives. Isaiah 2:4: "*He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. **They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.***" They will know we are Christians by our love, but also by our **peacemaking**.

The touch of Jesus is peace. We must transform our implements of violence into tools of peace, which with love can feed and care for all humanity, all of God's creatures and creation. AMEN