

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth; for His word is truth. Amen**

**Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity (2022)**

**The Compassion of Christ**

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*“As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”” (Luke 7:12–13, ESV)*

The continued story of death and destruction caused by hurricane Ian is another reminder of the devastating corruption sin brought into the world. The story of Creation tells us that what God created was perfect, a paradise created by God so man and God could live in perfect harmony. But sin came into the world and changed everything, bringing with it corruption and death, and funerals are a reminder of this corruption.

Deeply emotional and distressing events, funerals remind us that because of sin, a day will come when our own body will be the one lying in the casket. Our loved ones and our dear friends will grieve at our funeral, but not just because of our death, but also because our funeral will remind them of their own mortality. It will remind them of their own ultimate, earthly end, and it will raise fear in their hearts. Sin and its curse, death, are relentless in their pursuit of our own demise. We're reminded of death's pursuit in the old TLH hymn, “I Walk in Danger All the Way.” The third stanza of that great hymn says:

Death doth pursues me all the way,  
Nowhere I rest securely;  
He comes by night, he comes by day,  
He takes his prey most surely.  
A failing breath, and I  
In death's strong grasp may lie  
To face eternity for aye  
Death doth pursues me all the way. (TLH 413)

Death will come seeking his prey. He is the relentless predator who always gets his prey, and we are that prey. When we ponder death, we quickly realize that everyone we love, dies. Our parents, our spouse, our children, our siblings, our friends, everyone dies. This is why we cannot look at a casket and not see ourselves. In this life, death is our ultimate end. But death was not supposed to be, it is not natural.

Man was not created to die, but sin came into the world, and changed all things, including life. This is the reality the widow of Nain is now facing. Her world has changed because her only son has died.

St. Luke tells us that shortly after Jesus left Capernaum, He and His disciples and the crowd who were following Him came to the city of Nain. As they entered, they encountered another sizeable crowd, the funeral procession for the dead son of a widow. As was usual for Hebrew funerals, the dead body, wrapped in burial linen, was placed on a funeral bier, and carried to its resting place outside the city gates. While her son was living, the widow had security, but her

only son had died. Without her son and husband, the widow had no security, she is left helpless and bereft. Without her son the widow faces a life of isolation, a life of being ignored by her neighbors. But as we see, Jesus does not ignore her. No our Lord sees her, and St. Luke tells us He has compassion on her.

Compassion, that word in the Greek and the Hebrew which means a complete outpouring of one's inner feeling, the outpouring of pure mercy. Our Lord had felt this widow's grieving. He knew how dismal her future would be without her son. Therefore, He comes to her giving her hope and consolation. He literally gives her, her life back, and He says to her, "***Do not weep.***" (v. 13).

Do not weep, who would say that to a grieving widow today? None I dare say. But Jesus sees her suffering and He suffers with her. Just as He came to us to experience our pain, our sorrow, and our sin, consoling and forgiving us, He comes to the widow to console her. Filled with sympathy and compassion, His heart goes out to her, feeling her suffering just as if it were His own. Moved by His compassion, He tells her not to weep. Unbeknownst to her, Jesus will perform a miracle which will remove her suffering and pain and restore her only son.

St. Luke tells us Jesus touched the bier on which the dead son lay. This action by our Lord must have shocked the crowd, Jewish law declared a person ritually unclean if they touched a dead person. But rather than becoming ritually unclean, Jesus cleanses and heals. Jesus is filled with the power of holiness and life. In Jesus the divine Logos, the Word, has united with human flesh and a rational soul and become a man. Therefore, He brings divine purity to this unclean situation. In the past He has used His divine healing power to heal the sick, exorcise demons, and forgive sin. Now, in this miracle, by the power of His divine nature He will resurrect the dead.

This is the power of God which flows from His compassion for us. His compassion is more than mere feelings, it is purpose, the purpose to confront our pain at its source and to relieve us of its shackles. Moreover, pain is the curse of our sinful rebellion against God. Scripture tells us disobedience equals sin, and sin equals death. Thus, every time we see death, we see sin because sin caused death. St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, "***The sting of death is sin.***" (1 Corinthians 15:56, ESV) Sin is the point of the spear that kills us as it delivers its piercing, mortal wound. But as Jesus had compassion on the widow of Nain, God had compassion on us and sent His only begotten Son into this world to take on our flesh so He could take on our sin and thereby, take on the death we so richly deserve because of our sin. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners like you and me by taking our sin upon Himself.

Speaking to the boy, Jesus says, "***Young man, I say to you, arise . . . And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.***" (Luke 7:14-15, ESV)

In this miraculous resurrection we witness the power of Jesus over sin, death, and the devil; a power which Jesus displays in His own resurrection. Moreover, in this miracle we see the power of Christ to resurrect us from the dead. St. Paul reminds us of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord, saying that, "***I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.***" (Philippians 3:10-11, ESV)

As soon as the young man sat up, the crowd was seized by fear, yet they glorified God, saying "***A great prophet has arisen among us!***" and "***God has visited his people!***" (Luke 7:16, ESV) A resurrection would be the only kind of prophetic miracle Christ would perform. This miracle, this resurrection, is the ultimate statement that Jesus alone is the end time prophet and therefore the Messiah. Jesus declared this to be true when He read from the scroll of Isaiah in the

synagogue at Nazareth, reading, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18–19, ESV)* He has come to release the captives from their bondage to death. Like Elijah who raised the widow of Zarephath’s son from the dead, and Elisha who raised the Shunammite woman’s son from the dead, Jesus is following the pattern of the OT prophets. However, Jesus is the greater prophet raised by God to do greater things. Jesus shows He has the power to raise the hearer of the Gospel from the dead. His miracle shows the inbreaking of the messianic reign of God in grace and mercy. Miracles testify to the presence of God for salvation.

Furthermore, it is notable that in this resurrection, unlike His miracles of healing, Jesus never mentions the dead man’s faith, showing that this resurrection is ultimately not dependent on the faith of the person, but alone on the power and might of Jesus. The sick, were healed and the dead were raised solely by the Word of Christ.

The crowd reacting in fear while glorifying God, show that fear is the awe-inspired human response to the presence of God. As Jews they believed that God alone had power over life and death, therefore, Jesus must be a great prophet raised by God. But sadly they do not see in Jesus the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (52:13-53:12). They do not see the righteous one of God who came to be crucified and raised on the third day. Attributing the miracle to a man, to a great teacher and miracle worker, the crowd is guilty of the theology of glory, that image which sees the presence of Jesus solely to alleviate human pain and suffering. It is not until they understand that Jesus must also suffer rejection and be crucified to heal their sin filled souls, that they will be able to proclaim the full messianic confession of faith, the theology of the cross.

Today, many in the crowd, when they see Jesus, do not see the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. They do not see the One who is despised and rejected, they do not see the man of sorrow, the One whom men would not esteem. They do not understand that He bore our grief, our sorrow, and our sin, that He was smitten by God and afflicted, pierced for our transgressions. They do not see Him being crushed for our iniquities or that the chastisement that should have been ours was laid on Him. Nor do they see that His suffering and death brought us peace, that by His wounds we were reconciled and justified with God. They cannot understand that although we have all gone astray, that we have all turned to our own way, God did not lay the guilt at our feet, but rather He laid it at the feet of His beloved Son. Our Lord Jesus took upon Himself the punishment for our iniquities so God’s judgment would not fall on us, but upon Him. Sadly, too many today do not see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, instead they see only a man. Yes, a good man, one to emulate, but they do not see the Son of God who died in our place and was laid in the grave for our iniquities. They cannot understand the short funeral where death was put to death, where life triumphed over death by the death of God’s Son. Nor do they understand the glorious resurrection of the Son of God which points to our resurrection on the Last Day.

The Gospel Reading for today shows us a young man at Nain who is dead. His body is cold, and he is ready for burial. But Jesus comes along, and everything changes because Jesus says to him, *“Young man . . . arise.” (Luke 7:14, ESV)* It is noticeable that Jesus does not say to the young man to exercise his free will and choose Jesus as his Savior. The man is dead, he has no free will. Nor did Jesus tell him to say the “sinners’ prayer,” to welcome Jesus into his heart as the Lord of life. No, He was already dead, and unable to speak. Christ gave the widow’s son, life from death and all this He did only out of His divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in this young man. This is how St. Paul depicts us in his letter to the Ephesians, declaring that since birth we are dead in our trespasses and sins, with no hope for revival or

salvation, but then solely out of His goodness, His compassion, Jesus comes and makes us alive. Solely by the power of His Word, Jesus awakens our heart and gives us the gift of faith which makes us alive in Him. By grace you have been saved.

Yes, like the dead widow's son, since birth you have been headed for the grave and there is nothing you can do to alter that course. Death is inevitable. You cannot make it go away and at the hour of your death, Satan will do everything he can to make your death the most miserable moment of your life. He will remind you of all your sins; your violations of the Ten Commandments, your sins of thought, word, and deed. He will remind you that you used to stand in judgment of others and now you will stand before God in judgment. Satan will be your prosecutor, accusing you of every vile sin you have ever committed. He wants to make your death miserable. But in that moment Christ comes to you and reminds you that by His holy death He has conquered death. By His suffering and crucifixion He has paid the price for your sin, fulfilling the Law in your place, His innocence bears your sins, and out of His mercy He saves you. The death of Jesus silences Satan's accusations assuring you of eternal life. Of this truth, St. Paul reminds you, saying, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** (Romans 8:1, ESV)

With this precious truth, the fear of death is vanquished, and you can look forward to being with the Lord, reveling in all that He has done for you. He who gave you the gift of faith will fulfill His promise to you of eternal life. The compassion our Lord had for the widow of Nain will be poured out upon you in that hour and you will be comforted knowing that not only are you safe in His hands but all your loved ones who have been given the gift of faith to believe in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, are also in His hands and therefore, they are safe. Oh, sure, death in this life will consume them, but by *The Compassion of Christ*, their death is but an open portal to heaven. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.