

Luke 7:12-15, “As (Jesus) 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. ¹³ And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ ¹⁴ Then He came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.”

Today’s Gospel is one that we should take to heart that it may strengthen and confirm our faith. You see, Jesus does not have in view the welfare of this woman only. He wants to teach all of us to look upon death as an insignificant thing, of which we have no reason to be afraid. Instead, we are called to await death and other misfortunes with a believing and patient heart, because we are assured of having a Lord who can easily help us overcome death and other misfortunes.

Look how quickly and easily the woman is delivered, after having given up all hope of help. Her only-begotten son. Dead. Her husband. Dead. She isn’t even given a name in our text. She is just “a widow.” She has no place, no one to care for her. No family. No future. All she has is the unclean body of her only-begotten son. This funeral procession for her son, might as well be her funeral procession as well.

What emotions are swirling in her thoughts and mind? Fear? Uncertainty? Anger? Her only-begotten son was her only future. She is vulnerable, unsure of what chaos will come upon her after this funeral procession meets its end outside the city gates.

(Pause) We all have experienced that chaos at different times. Death, a move, grief over a lost job, a bitter divorce that has left you gasping for breath. This chaos makes us uncertain of our place, unsure of why we’re here and where we fit into the whole scheme of things. You don’t know what is going to happen next.

Pastors have led many processions to the grave. Emotions differ from family to family. There is numbness, fear, and even uncertainty. Because we live in a fallen world, many of you do know that gut-wrenching time.

So, here she is, making her way, and what happens next? This procession of death meets head-on with another procession. This procession is headed by The Lord of Life, who orders all things by the Word of His mouth. It looks like chaos, a traffic nightmare gone awry, but when she hears the words of the Lord everything changes.

Picture the scene in your mind once again. Jesus draws near to the gate, where there is this procession of death. In an instant, He takes it all in—the widow, the son, the crowd, the fear, and chaos. He sees all of this and then our text has one of those great, richest of all possible Gospel words. Jesus has compassion on her. “Compassion”—it literally means that His heart or gut aches for her. He sees this insanity of her life, all of the fear and worry and anxiety and uncertainty—and He is moved with compassion to help her.

You see, God is always moving. He is never satisfied to sit back and watch us from afar. He sees the chaos. He knows the insanity and fear of our lives. He took on flesh and knows everything that we have gone and will go through. He sees and experiences all of it—yet, without sin. And how does the Author of Life, the Author of Creation respond to it all? He is moved, in fact, He is constantly moved to compassion for you, for me, for all.

(Pause) Jesus says to this heartbroken woman, “Do not weep.” At first glance, this sounds rather strange. I mean, the last thing that you want to say to someone, especially if you haven’t gone through it yourself is, “I know exactly what you’re going through.” It would be like if I was trying to console a woman who has just had a double mastectomy due to breast cancer, and I say to her, “I know exactly what you’re going through.” No, I don’t.

“Don’t weep?” Can you see this woman’s eyes stare a hole through Jesus? My only son is dead, and I might as well be dead with him! Don’t tell me not to weep. Don’t tell me You know exactly what I am going through.

But then Jesus does something even more crazy. He touches the funeral bier. This bier was kind of like a big stretcher, where the body is held up on the shoulder by several men. Jesus touches the bier and everyone stands still.

For us, we don’t quite get this. We might look at touching a dead thing as kind of gross, but not that it would have anything to do with anything else. You’d wash your hands afterward. However, in Jesus’ day, to touch something that was dead made you unclean. It means that you couldn’t enter into the Temple for seven days. These men were actually making a sacrifice by carrying the widow’s only son to this grave.

And yet, here comes Jesus walking up and touching this bier! Our Lord has that way about Him, doesn’t He? He can walk into the messiest chaos of our lives and bring peace. There is no trouble too great for Him. There is no mess too messy for Him. Our sin. Our shame. Our guilt. Even death itself. He comes right up to it, and He is not afraid. He wasn’t afraid then, and He isn’t afraid for you either. He comes into your life, your messiness, and everything else.

Then, Jesus says these words to the dead one, “Young man, I say to you, arise!” He doesn’t say, “Get up when you have enough faith.” He doesn’t say, “After you’ve cleaned up your life, get up, and we’ll make a plan for your best life now.” He doesn’t say, “If you just put enough money into the offering plate, then I will bless you in return.” No. Jesus’ word brings what He commands, and His gracious command here is very simple—Live.

(Pause) Martin Luther writes of this miracle: “But, after all hope had failed, Jesus draws near and does nothing more than say: “Young man, I say to you, Arise!” And at once the dead

man arises and lives. Here we must confess that in the eyes of the Lord death is like life, and that it makes no difference to Him whether we live or are dead. For though we had died, for Him we are not dead, because He can overcome death and restore life by a single word. Therefore, the Lord truly says: “God is not a God of the dead, but of the living.” Though Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other saints are dead for us, yet they live to God.”

Luther continues, “And so, from the Gospel reading today and from the son of the widow we should learn ... the great power which God, through Christ, will apply to us at the last day, when, by a word, He will recall to life all people and give everlasting salvation to believers. This will be done in the twinkling of an eye, in order that we may not doubt in the least either the power of our Lord Jesus to do this or His will gladly to do it. For here we have the example. The son of the widow is dead; he has lost the gift of hearing and all other senses. But when Christ speaks to him, he hears. This is certainly a strange and wonderful incident. He that does not hear, hears; and he that does not live lives. Nothing is done but that Christ opens His mouth and invites him to rise. The single word is so powerful that death has to vanish and life return..”

(Pause) “Arise,” Jesus says. His gracious Word brings with it life, healing, forgiveness, salvation, and cleansing. All in a word and the touch of our Lord.

The closer this procession of life came to the woman and her son, the crazier it looked. But the crazy had to get closer so that she could hear the Word of Jesus, the word of life and hope for a fallen and messed up world.

Do you hear it? After all, this same Word of life, healing, forgiveness, salvation, and cleansing is yours. It is in these times of chaos in our lives that God is at work for you. When things are darkest, when the insanity and uncertainty is at its very peak, so that you can't seem to take any more, that is the time to quiet your mouth and open your ears. For God is coming to

you, lowly and gently, with His Word of life and forgiveness. I have taken your place on the Cross and exchanged My life fully and completely for yours. I am bodily risen from the dead for you on the Third Day. Be still and know that I am God. You are joined to My death and resurrection in the waters of your Baptism. Take eat. Take drink. I forgive you all of your sins.

It is for our sakes that Jesus has done this miracle. He certainly knows that we are afraid of death. To that He says, do not be afraid and let not your heart be troubled. Though death is terrible, what can it harm you? It may terrify you. But learn to avoid judging by your feelings and following your fears: look to Jesus and remember what He can do and what He desires to do. He can raise you from death as easily as you awaken a person out of sleep. And, He will do it cheerfully and with pleasure.

(Pause) Dear friends in Christ, Jesus gave the son back to his mother. God restores what is broken, binds up what is wounded, and gives healing and hope to all of us. For we are all widows in a way. We are lost without the gentle touch and word from our Lord.

But in Him and through Him, we are now restored into fellowship with Him, where life and healing and hope are all wrapped up in Him with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. You see, even right now we are in procession. It is the procession of death to life. And, as His baptized, we are on this heavenly journey.

You see, right now, you are at peace, for Christ your Lord has touched your grave in Holy Baptism, and calls to you even now—Come and live. Come and be comforted. Your sins are forgiven. I have clothed Myself on you. Death is defeated. The grave has no power over you. Come eat and drink My true body and blood in the unleavened bread and wine where I live in you, for where I live, you, too, shall live forever as well. From this strife, you have joy immortal! Amen.