

Trinity 16

Lk 7:11-17 (ESV)

"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."

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

A blessed Lord's Day to all of you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I pray that all the busyness and organized chaos of daily life hasn't worn you down more than it should. As of late, I've become increasingly appreciative of the ability to discern what things I should and should not devote my attention to throughout the day, especially when certain things interrupt my normal routine. Some things can be put off for a time, but you know as well as I do that there are some things that intrude on our lives that cannot and will not be ignored--things which interrupt and demand our attention and even summon us, as it were, to devote something lots of time and energy, but which we'd much rather just put off indefinitely if we could. A painful infection in your gums, for example, will intrude on whatever it is you're doing and demand your attention and compel you to your dentist's office. A summons for jury duty quite literally interrupts your routine and demands your presence in court. I'm told there are people who actually look forward to jury duty, but I'm not sure I really believe it. But all jokes aside, dear ones, there's nothing that will interrupt and intrude and demand your attention quite like the summons of death--a summons which ultimately will not be ignored and which we're all compelled to acknowledge whether we want to or not like the poor widow of Nain and her dear son in our Gospel text.

This is the picture painted for us here in St. Luke's Gospel--initially it's one of great sorrow. Not only had the widow's husband received the summons of death, but now even her son, her only son, had received the very same. Cruel death was imposing himself on them in a profound way, ripping the young man away from his mother, their family and friends, and their whole town. Cruel death was pleased to disrupt their lives and relationships and then to leave them disfigured and full of pain. Maybe you can relate. So, there they were, both the widow and a great crowd from her town, slowly making the grim pilgrimage to the burial grounds where they and especially the widow's son had been summoned, to the place where the mouth of death was gaping wide open in the grave ready to devour this young man just like his father before him as if it were some ungodly feast or an infernal banquet that's horrific to the extreme. And this whole scene in our text of the widow, her lifeless son, and the great crowd processing to the place of burial is a rather vivid image for what life ultimately is for humanity after the fall into sin. Whether someone dies full of years having accomplished much, or whether someone dies having not lived out even half his days, in the end, life for fallen man amounts to a somber procession into the open mouth of the grave.

And this is because, after Adam sinned in the Garden and turned away from life with God, from the life in which man was always intended to live and move and have his being, the holy Scriptures teach us that death not only came into the world and "spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12), but that death has also reigned, it has exercised a kind of dominion over the fallen children of Adam like a grotesque and tyrannical king--one who summons all people--young and old, rich and poor--no matter their level of education, no matter what they might be busy with in life or what they feel they still need to attend to--death is pleased to interrupt and impose himself on a whim and to compel the fallen children of Adam to attend his horrific

banquet where he would feast on them and all of us in the grave. And he does so even in spite of all the countless billions he's devoured up to now. For just as death is a proud tyrant who fears no man, he's also a glutton and a drunkard, always opening the mouth of the grave, always hungering and thirsting for the flesh and blood of mankind but never being satisfied no matter how much he eats and drinks. And just as death was ready to consume the son of the poor widow of Nain as the funeral procession came closer and closer to the mouth of the grave, death would be quite pleased to do the same to you were it not for the Lord Jesus Christ--the One Who is the salvation of God in human flesh and Who brings us into communion with His indestructible life.

Seeing the widow of Nain's great tragedy unfolding before Him, Jesus had compassion on her, and so He draws near and touches the bier--the frame on which the deceased were carried to the grave--and our text then says the bearers stood still, stopped in their tracks. The whole liturgy of death, the grim procession to death's banquet had been gloriously interrupted by the Lord Jesus Christ. And He then opens His lips and speaks in His majesty as the One through Whom all things were made in the beginning--He speaks His divine, life-giving Word, summoning the young man from the dead and stealing him out of the jaws of the grave. Proud, gluttonous death, who knew not how to restrain himself from all his feasting, was now compelled to fast. And in all of this, dear ones, our Savior uses even death to show His divine glory as the Lord of Hosts, the incarnate King of kings, infinitely superior to the tyrant of death--something our Savior would reveal again even more brilliantly by willingly giving Himself into death on the cross and into the open mouth of the grave, and, in doing so, overcoming them, rising victorious on the third day like the conquering Lord He is, and Who now makes us participants in His triumph by grace, like He did for the young man in our text.

Let me ask you, dear ones, has the Lord Jesus not also spoken His life-giving Word into your ears and raised you up from a life of spiritual death, from a life lived wholly apart from the divine life of God and the salvation found in Him? Will the Prince of Peace not also bring you out from the mouth of the grave, raising you up on the last day like the widow's son with a gentle summons as if He were kindly rousing you from a peaceful rest? And as the Lord Jesus granted the widow's son a very limited share in His own indestructible life, does Christ not also make us participants in His divine life far more profoundly as the sons of God through baptism? Are we not strengthened and nourished in this our new life in Christ by the Sacrament of the Altar, by Him giving us His true body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of all our sins? Here we partake of the feast above all feasts; here we eat and drink unto salvation, proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes.

So, when you receive the summons of Christ to walk in newness of life like the widow's son, when you hear the Lord Jesus summoning you to feast at the divine banquet here in church and see the joyful procession of the saints coming in, no Christian should think anything takes priority over that. You'd be amazed at the excuses people give for refusing to come. One of the more common ones people give is that they've received a summons for them or their kids to play sports on Sunday morning, and they dutifully obey as if they couldn't imagine an obligation more solemn or sacred. Far be it from any of you, dear ones, to have such an unchristian mind and disposition towards the Lord Jesus, Who has made death itself to be His slave and Who now bids us to eat and drink in His presence so that we too would overcome death in Him. For us, dear ones, it is the highest honor to receive the summons of our Lord to come here for these things, to be raised to newness of life like the widow's son and to say with him and St. Simeon, Lord "my eyes have seen thy salvation and the glory of thy people Israel."

To the same Lord Jesus Christ is all worship, honor, and glory now and forever. Amen.