

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

“Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.”

When you see what Jesus did in the Gospel reading today, it’s quite something. Death is our enemy but Jesus stops death dead in its tracks. He has overcome death by his death. Seeing him raise this son of the widow gives you comfort as you get a glimpse into what awaits you when the Lord will say to you on the Last Day, “I say to you, arise.”

Really this does piggy backs well off what we heard last week from Matthew’s Gospel regarding the words of Jesus to not be anxious and see of what great value we are before the Father. The things of the world don’t cause us to stumble and doubt the care God has for us in Christ. Our eyes are looking forward to the day when we will forever be with him in Kingdom. The here and now are seen in view of this day final day, the Day of Resurrection.

Death, then, for the Christian is seen differently because we know that death has been defeated. We understand what death is and what death isn’t. Death isn’t pretty. It’s a nasty, horrible, and ugly thing. Think about the two accounts of death before us this morning. Both involve the death of a child and a mother who is mourning his loss. In the Old Testament reading we heard, “After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, ‘What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!’”

Something similar is in the reading from Luke. “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.” Mothers weeping over the death of their children is not the way things should be or are supposed to be. Really death for that matter is not the way things should be. The God who is everlasting, the source of life, and life itself doesn’t create people to die. He doesn’t give children to parents in order that they would suffer the anguish of seeing their children placed on a funeral bier and led to a tomb to be buried. That’s not what God intended things to be nor what he created.

As Christians we understand death for what it is and see where it comes from; “the wages of sin is death.” In the Garden of Eden God attached a promise to the command given to Adam. “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” The promise of death when it came to sin was because of God’s justice. Sin and God do not go together just as death and life do not. God is just against sin and blood must be shed. His wrath is righteous against what is against him and his perfect law because he is good and his law, ways, and will are good.

Yet God is not the author of sin or evil. No, these things are foreign to God and his creation. The devil brought sin into the world and since the Fall into sin we are conceived and born into sin under the reign of the devil and his rule. But this doesn’t mean God is not God and Lord over all creation. God doesn’t simply say, “whoops, that messed up, what am I going to do now?” No. In Ephesians 1 God tells us, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

As Christians and knowing all of this revealed by God to you, you see death and call it for what it is; death is terrible. When you see death around you in this world this should be our first response and what hits us square in the eye. Death is not natural, it’s awful. We don’t mince words, then, we don’t try to write it off or to blunt the knife in a way we think will make things better. Our old Adam sure tries though. He likes to think he is above crying, above mourning. He thinks he can just celebrate life and memories. Sadly, more even within the Christian Church this is happening as you see funerals pushed aside, redefined, or reworded. Our old man wants to do things his way.

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The devil is at work too. He tries to trick us and think death really isn't that bad. He also lies to us and the world around us saying, "it's ok in the end. It doesn't matter what the person believed, everyone goes to a better place." But you see, as Christians we don't buy into the lies. We know the seriousness of it all. We call death, "death." We cry out, "Lord, have mercy."

Yet in this there's something we see and know because of what the Scriptures teach us. As death is terrible and our enemy we see the enemy lies defeated. Our enemy has been named and we stare it straight into its sinister little eyes and say, "you may have a loud bark and show your sharp teeth and nip at our ankles but, you know what death? You've lost. You've been defeated by the one who alone can do it and the one who in return gives us the victory he has won."

"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!' And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country."

The only answer to death is the death of Christ because his death atones for sin. Only his perfect obedient life could offer up to God the sacrifice required to reconcile you to God. Only God in the flesh could die the death for you and in your place. And by his resurrection you know that peace has been made and you stand forgiven and have life even as you face death. Seeing Jesus do what he does in the Gospel reading then is not surprising as he stops death in its tracks and by merely speaking a word, "rise" he raises this widow's son from the dead.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that's your Lord who did this and your Lord who has called you his own in Holy Baptism. Jesus knows what death is, he doesn't sugar coat it. Even as he saw this woman weeping over her son and said, "do not weep" Jesus himself would weep in John 11 over the death of his friend, Lazarus. But you see this were not tears of despair but tears of compassion, tears of mercy. Jesus knew the cost. The Father knows the cost and what it is to have his only begotten Son dead on the cross and laid into a tomb. Jesus knew the price that must be paid and he paid it freely and fully in his blood. He knew the suffering, the agony, and ugliness that is sin and death yet he endured for your sake.

As Christians you view death in view of Jesus who is the resurrection and the life. You view it as one who sees an enemy to be sure before you but one who already knows the outcome. This means as terrible as death is, you don't fear death as a Christian. You don't cower down in the face of it, let it rule your life, or paralyze you in anxiousness because you know death for what it really is and who has really overcome it. Facing the death of your loved ones who are in Christ is to face a terrible thing on this side of the grave and one where there is great pain and weeping but it's to face it as one who knows that even if death should take your child from you, it doesn't have the last word. The final say even amid death is the word of Jesus today, "rise."

Baptized into Christ you have this because you have been crucified with Jesus and raised to new life. Your life is hidden in Christ who has covered you with himself and his righteousness. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are what belong to you each and every day you have in this world and whenever that day comes when you breathe your last in the world, that same forgiveness, life, and salvation are yours. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

The consolation God gives you today is what you heard in the Epistle reading, "So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

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Those words are your life in Christ because Jesus is the one who has done it all for you. Clinging to Christ you have life, and you know for certain what is yours even as you face all that is uncertain and terrible from the devil, the fallen world, and your own fallen flesh. Yet the Lord is the one who has called you by name and speaks to you his word which pierces through it all. You know what yours in this life is and what is yours even in death. You sing, “The Will of God is always Best” because you have the confidence of Christ crucified and risen for you. Each day you have this and know it as you repent of your sin and cling to Jesus who is your Redeemer.

Those words of the antiphon in the Introit sum up well our lives hearing these miracles and seeing our share in this life. “Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.” Indeed, the Lord is good and forgiving. He gives us peace and says to you “rise.” You cling to those words as death and hell surround you in the very midst of life. You have life here and now and know with certainty that the day is coming when the Lord will say to you “rise” and your body will rise to immortality and life where sin, death, and suffering are no more only life eternal.

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

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