

Saint Thomas' Church
Trinity XVI
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rmcneely+

Young man, I say unto thee.... Arise.

Father Swithen was struggling with this week's sermon. But he and his wife were moving house and he had to spend much of the week boxing and sorting and lifting. He came upon a box under their bed. It contained three eggs and \$1,000 in cash. He could not imagine how it got there so he asked his good wife.

She responded that throughout their marriage she had been keeping track of her husband's sermons and every time he gave a bad one, or laid an egg, she took one of the hen's eggs and put it in the box under their bed.

Father took some confidence in this. And thought he must have been doing well with only three eggs in the box. But what was the \$1,000 for he asked. His kind wife being a frugal vicar's wife said, well every time there were a dozen eggs; I sold them.

Let is all hope I will not find an egg under our bed in the morning.

Today's Gospel is known by many as the story of the "Widow of Nain".

It takes place during Jesus' Galilean ministry;
that early time when Jesus ministered to His home province.
Only the day before
Jesus had raised the servant of the Centurion from the dead.
And a growing crowd began to follow Him.
Some to see what magic He would perform
Others to be with the man they thought of as the Messiah
Some as skeptics to be able to spot and declare fraud.

But this event must have silenced the skeptics for a time at least.
 The Sadducees
 The Pharisees
 Who scoffed at the miracles as stunts
 That they were carefully staged
 And exaggerated by people who were spreading the word.

But too many people saw this one,
 Devoted followers and skeptics alike
 And there was no opportunity for staging or craft.

On this day two large bodies of people collided in the narrow gate
 of the small town of Nain.

Jesus and the throng that was following Him across Galilee
 was about to enter the city as the funeral procession
 and most of the city's inhabitants were leaving to bury a
 young man in the cemetery.

The mother of the dead young man is the early focus of the story.
 Her only son had died.

But before him, her husband had died.

In the culture of the time, the circumstance was not just a sad one
 as it would be for any of us. It could a death sentence for the
 widow.

When her husband had died, widow became dependent upon
 her son for her survival

When her son died ,
 she was on her own.

In the agricultural world at the time

The job market for women was non-existent

She was fully dependent upon charity of friends and family
 for food and shelter

Chances were good that the widow would slowly starve to death in
 the cold

But there is also her crushing grief.

I don't think one can ever truly comprehend what it is like for a parent to lose a child unless you have been there yourself. There is probably nothing harder in this life.

In the last few years my family has lost three sons.

The heart shattering grief
of the three mothers and fathers
was almost too much to bear.

As we stood by unable to help them through our own tears.

I pray that no more of us will know such pain.

The scene at the Gate of Nain was one of despair,
of death
without hope.

Turn away from the despair for a moment and look to see the other procession meeting this one.

At the head of this procession is another Only Son.

And He leads not a procession of death
But of Life

No one asked Him to

But, Jesus touches the funeral bier
and nothing was ever quite the same after that.
Life touches Death.

In our world, death always wins when the instruments of death touch life:

Whether by fatal disease

Bullets

Speeding cars

Angry fists

Life gives way to death in our world

But it is not so with Jesus
 He is here to undo our broken world
 To undo death itself

Jesus is the one who will wipe every tear from our eyes
 And so when Jesus touches death,
 death must give way.

“Young man, I say unto thee arise.” And the son is restored to his mother.

But Jesus did not raise this man only because of his compassion for the widow of Nain. It is a sign of His compassion for the whole world. It is a sign of events that would follow in the next year.

We probably cannot appreciate the combined crowd’s feelings upon seeing the young man sit up upon his funeral bier and speak. It must have been meaningful to Luke the physician
 to hear that life had been restored to one who died.
 Luke describes it this way: “there came a fear on all”.

That word fear as used here
 and in other places of the liturgy and scripture
 was always a curiosity for me.

It is a translation from the Greek, phobos, which does not translate into a single English word very well.

It includes fear
 as in being afraid or frightened of some impending danger.

But it also includes the concept of
 profound respect,
 reverence
 and awe.

As used here, Phobos is closer to “awesome”.
 And for good reason. Not only had the crowd witnessed a man raised from the dead.
 But it was a reminder of an Old Testament event that they all knew very well.

We have to go back to 1st Kings (17:23) and the story of Elijah.
 Elijah was highly significant to the Jews
 and they knew his story very well.
 There was a time when God used Elijah to raise another widow’s son from the dead
 (Widow of Zarephath)
 Right before their eyes Jesus had done the very same thing.
 And in almost the very same place.

The parallels were too striking for any to miss. Was this man Jesus Elijah returned from God?
 The prophesy said that Elijah’s return would precede the coming of the Messiah. After 400 years was it all about to start?

Luke subtly emphasizes the connection between the two events
 Jesus raising the son of the Widow of Nain
 And Elijah raising the son of the Widow of Zarephath
 by using the identical language in his account of the Widow of Nain as appears in the book of Kings and the story of Elijah.

Sometimes I feel like a code breaker unlocking a secret from the words, when you were to read each story in their original languages:

 After restoring the son to life,
 Both Jesus and Elijah were said to have
 “presented him to his mother” using the same and peculiar words.

No wonder “there came a fear on all” and all who saw it felt profound respect or reverence or awe at what had happened.

Here is yet another instance of the Old Testament foretelling the New and the New Fulfilling the Old.

It is one BIG story.

Linked in time.

This story told by Luke in its present tense,
is both a link to the past
and to the future.

Jesus was also foretelling his own death and resurrection.

It would be about another year

when he faced death again and conquered it,

but that time it would be for the benefit of all mankind:

At His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

For us who know the rest of the story,

the Widow of Nain is even more meaningful.

Just as Jesus was moved by the sorrow that the brokenness of the world had brought to this widow,

so He is moved in compassion for us. Today. Right Now.

He knows

and feels our grief more deeply than we know.

He made us.

While others in our lives may forget

or abandon

and fade away,

He never does.

He always knows our sorrows.

He bore them for you and for me on the cross. Upon the cross He absorbed

our miseries

and heartaches,

our sorrows

and grief.

He bore the full weight of the sin of the world.

The pain,
the injustice,
the unfairness
was all wrought upon Him who is Life,
down to death,
even death on the cross.

For that final time, the Lord
who is Life
touched death
and death gave way.

He died on that cross – but in that death he destroyed the power of death. Forever.

The story of the Widow of Nain which began as a story of despair and death, is an uplifting story of Hope.

Dear friends, this is our hope in the face of all sorrows.

No matter your grief or heartache,
no matter your sorrow in this world

Look to Jesus for comfort and healing

He has promised it.

Your sorrow will be turned to joy.

He purchased it with His blood.

The story of the Widow of Nain is not about faith
Not about gratitude

It is about grace-

Pure

Unadulterated

Undiluted

Exclaimed and

Unasked for Grace. Hope.

This miracle happened because Jesus has compassion

For the Widow. For us.

Jesus does not offer political

Economic, or

Military solutions to modern problems

He gives us insight into God's way of dealing with human misery

With endless compassion

Kindness,

And love.

So cast your cares on Him and know that you have nothing to fear.

Trust in Him

Call to Him in prayer

Heed His word of comfort and gladness

Receive His sacrament and forgiveness

And he that was dead, sat up and began to speak

Jesus lives and death must die.

Amen.