

Another Resurrection

Luke 7:11-17

Jesus was in the little village of Nain. A large crowd had gathered around him, as was so frequently the case.

Not much happened in the little town of Nain. They would have rolled up the sidewalks at nine o'clock, except that they had no sidewalks. In fact, nine o'clock was quite late in Nain. People wound up their day much earlier than that. Not much happened in Nain after dark. Not much happened in Nain *before* dark. It was a "not much happening" place.

But today was different! Today, Jesus had come to Nain. That was pretty amazing! Jesus was getting a lot of attention these days. In fact, He was on His way to becoming famous. Nain didn't attract many famous men. And so they gathered round Him, hoping that He would say or do something interesting — something that would relieve them from the tedium of this little, dusty, one-donkey town.

Jesus should have been flattered by all of the attention that they gave Him. In fact, He should have been completely focused on the crowd. He should have been devoting all of His attention to their questions and His answers. After all, one of them might become a great disciple. One of them might become an important contributor to His ministry.

But Jesus was *not* completely focused on the crowd. He noticed out of the corner of His eye that something was going on down the street. A funeral procession! The crowd was large there, too. *That* was amazing! How often would there be two crowds on the same day in Nain?

Jesus looked more closely, and what He saw broke his heart. He saw an old woman, dressed in black. There was no old man beside her. She was alone, and she was mourning. Perhaps the old man was on the funeral bier being carried through the street just ahead of her. But no! The body on the funeral bier was that of a young man. Her son! It had to be her son!

Who wouldn't be moved by such a scene? Who wouldn't be distracted? In that time and place, it was a very patriarchal society. A woman *had* nothing without her man. She *was* nothing apart from her man. And this old woman had no man. Her husband must be dead, and now her son was dead too. It was hard to imagine a more pitiful scene.

Luke says that Jesus was moved to compassion. Of course, He was moved to compassion! Who wouldn't be moved to compassion?

Jesus excused himself from *His* crowd. He left off His teaching and stopped listening for questions. He moved toward the funeral procession. The crowd watched, expecting him to offer his condolences to the old woman. That would be a nice gesture from this famous man!

How sad that Jesus hadn't been here a couple of days earlier. Everyone had heard how He had healed the sick. Perhaps He could have done something two days ago. How the crowd would have loved that! Not only would it have saved this woman her terrible grief; it would also have

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been a great honor for this little village — to have a holy man work a miracle in their midst; it would also have relieved the numbing boredom of this pitiful little village. They would have appreciated that! They would have loved it! But it was too late now! The young man was dead. It was over!

Jesus stopped for a moment beside the old woman. Both crowds paused. It was an electric moment! What would He say?

Jesus told the old woman not to cry. How disappointing! Preachers sometimes talk like that — at least in difficult moments — at least in their ‘I’m not quite sure what to say’ moments. They say, “Don’t worry; he’s gone to Heaven.” But people are never comforted by hearing that! They are grieving at their *loss*, and their loss is terrible!

But then Jesus moved toward the young man’s body. The pallbearers stood stock-still. They weren’t sure what to do! The undertaker hadn’t briefed them for this. They had never seen anyone stop a funeral procession on the way to the cemetery.

Jesus reached out with His hand and touched the bier. And then He started talking to the young man’s body. The crowd had He lost His mind? Was He going to do something terrible? Was He going to defile this sacred moment and make this an even more terrible day for the old woman? Whatever else was happening, you can be sure that Jesus had everyone’s full attention.

And then He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” Then the people closest to the bier noticed a movement. And then there was another! And then this young man, wrapped in his grave clothes, began to struggle to sit up. He said something to his mother. He probably asked what was going on! He probably asked her to unbind him!

And suddenly the people were afraid! They had hoped that Jesus would say or do something memorable. They were hoping that He would say or do something that their children would remember when they were older. But they weren’t prepared for this! This was astounding!

And then they began to shout! “A great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people.” Suddenly, they understood!

In just a few moments, with just a few words, Jesus had made their day. He had restored the young man to life, and He had restored the old woman to joy!

But, as we read this story today, we wonder what it has to do with us. Jesus raised this young man from the dead, but He doesn’t do that anymore. Does He? Jesus had found a woman at the bottom and had lifted her to the top. But He doesn’t do that anymore. Does He? What does this story have to do with us?

When I read this story, I remembered that we call ourselves disciples of Christ. We all know what that means. The word, disciple, means “learner.” A disciple is a person who is learning from their teacher. A disciple is a person who is learning to be more like their teacher. What can we learners learn from this story?

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One thing we can learn from this story is compassion. Jesus was a compassionate man. He saw this grieving widow, and was moved with compassion. And in His compassion, He did something to help.

But now Jesus is in heaven. Now, if Jesus' work is to get done, His disciples have to do it. We are His hands in this world. He has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us so that, just as people could look at Jesus and see the Father, so people can look at us and see the Son. So we, Jesus' disciples, need to put Jesus' compassion into practice.

People need compassion today, don't they? This is a tough world, and many people are hurting. They are lonely; they are afraid; they are broken-hearted; they are grieving. As I look out on this congregation, I know the pain that some of you are suffering. Anyone preaching today can look out on their congregation and count the hurting people. We need compassion; we need someone who will touch us with a gentle hand. And the people around us at home, at work, and at play need compassion too.

A little caring makes such a difference. When Edgar Guest, the famous poet, was a young man, his first child died. He just felt terrible. He says:

I was lonely and defeated.
There didn't seem to be anything in life ahead of me
that mattered very much.

Then he had to go to the drugstore for something. The pharmacist, a man named Jim Potter, saw him come in and motioned for him to follow him to the little office in the back of the store. When they were standing together in that quiet place, the pharmacist put his hands on Guest's shoulders and said:

Eddie, I can't really express what I want to say,
the sympathy I have in my heart for you.
All I can say is that I'm sorry,
and I want you to know that if you need anything, anything at all,
come to me.
What is mine is yours.

Many years later, Guest remembered that moment. He said:

Just a neighbor across the way — a passing acquaintance.
Jim Potter may long since have forgotten that moment
when he gave me his hand and his sympathy,
but I shall never forget it, never in my life.
To me it stands out like the silhouette of a lonely tree
against a crimson sunset.

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That's how it is, isn't it! Can't you remember when someone reached out and touched you with a healing hand? Don't you wish someone would reach out today and touch you with a healing hand? Don't you wish that you could reach out and touch someone else with a healing hand?

You can! There are hurting people that will be sitting in these pews today. Haven't you heard the prayer requests! And there is so much that is left unsaid at prayer request time – hurts so tender that the person cannot even speak of them.

And it isn't just here that people are hurting. You will meet hurting people at work. You will stand next to them at the check-out counter. Sometimes they will be difficult to love, because they will be lashing out. But Christ has asked us to be His caring hands, reaching out to touch these people with healing hands.

John Killinger, a well-known Presbyterian minister, tells about a business friend who was praying for a friend one morning. The friend was going through a tough time, so the prayer went something like this:

Dear God, please put your loving arms around my friend...

But then it was as if someone was speaking to him, so he stopped praying for a moment and listened. The voice said:

What's wrong with putting your loving arms around him?
That is how people feel my arms.

That is what Christ wants us to do. That is what His disciples are to do. And then we shall truly be sons and daughters of our Father who is in Heaven.