

Sermon for June 9, 2013

Third Sunday of Pentecost, Luke 7:11-17

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR
LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

In Hebrew they refer to women such as me as al-maw-naw which means widow but that does not **begin** to convey the **real** meaning of the word which literally means an empty house. In our part of the world to be a widow is to be one who is in an **especially difficult** position because now for a woman **like me** to be left with **no** man in my life to **support** me in our agricultural community is an **awful** situation to be in. After my husband's death my **son** took care of me even though he was only a **young** man. He was my **only hope** of support. Now that support is gone. Not only have I lost my husband to death but now my **one and only** son has died also. There is **no** one left to do the backbreaking farm work which involves working in the fields for **many** hours each day. According to our laws now that my son is dead I am **prohibited** from inheriting the land that my husband and son worked so **hard** to farm. The future for one such as me is **bleak** at best. I am now left to the whims and charity of the community. I have been **rendered powerless and helpless** by this tragedy. I have **little hope** for my future being saved as today we are burying my son, my beloved one and only son.

I live in the small town of Nain which is not on the way to anywhere in particular. It is **25** miles or a day's journey from Capernaum and about **6** miles from Nazareth. We are situated on a **flat area** 60 feet up the **side** of a mountain. Our little town is not a place that is known by **too** many people. But these are things that are of **little consequence** for me today. As we proceed to bury my son *none of that really matters* at this moment—*or does it?* One **never** knows what God has in store for our future. *Do we?*

It is **late** afternoon and time for the funeral procession to begin as late in the day is the common time for Jewish funerals to take place. My son's body has been placed on a **bier** which is a wicker frame in which the body is laid for transportation to the final burial site. It is a hot and sunny day. The **sun shines** down on the faces of those people who begin to **crowd** together at our home to proceed to the **cave** where my son will be buried alongside my husband. **Tears are flowing** down everyone's cheeks as people in our town **know** my circumstances and the **outlook** for my future. The professional mourners and wailers come to be with the crowd to make sure that there is **plenty of noise** so that friends of mine, my relatives, and **especially** me can all cry our hearts out without being embarrassed about making a scene all by ourselves. Flute players have also come to play some **burial** songs. The body is wrapped in a **linen** burial shroud in which only my **beloved son's face** is exposed. Women are coming along with

burial spices to anoint the body since the body needs to be anointed once it is in the cave to offset the smell of decomposition which will come quickly. The **men** will be taking turns **sharing the honor and privilege** of being pall bearers for my son's body as it is quite a distance to the cave.

In our small town when death comes it affects **everyone** so the crowd making its way through the **narrow streets** from our family home is a **rather** large one. It is customary that **we women lead** the funeral procession. As we make our way to the city gate, which is really not much more than the **main** entrance into town where the **elders** of the community gather to discuss **town** business, I see a **large** group of people coming along the **narrow road**. This is **sort of** unusual for as I said our little town is not really on the way to anywhere.

At the front of the group I see a **few men gathered together** talking as they walk along and then **following behind them** there is a rather **large** crowd of people. The **funeral** procession and the **incoming** crowd have arrived at the town gate at the same time. The man who is **obviously the one** who the crowd is following sees me and walks up to me **right** away. I hear someone call him **Jesus**. I do **not know him**; although, I have **heard** of some of the **miraculous things** he has done. He sees me in **all my grief**, in **all my suffering**, and in **all my despair** as at that time I was still crying uncontrollably. He looks straight at me, directly into my eyes. I can see the **compassion and sympathy** for he has for me as he

tells me **not to weep**. But it is hard not to cry when your only beloved son is dead. I **am** suffering and I feel that **all of my hope** is gone. So why would I **not** cry? As anyone who has **lost a loved one** to death knows, having someone telling you **not to cry** is **not much comfort**.

When he tells me not to cry there is a **sense of anticipation** in the crowd about what he is going to do. And what he does next is **beyond** belief!! We women are still in **front** of the funeral procession, still **crying** uncontrollably, the flutes are still **playing mournfully**, then both crowds begin to **mingle** together so all can see what is happening. This Jesus **comes forward** to where my son is on the bi-er and he **touches** the bi-er!!! I **cannot believe** my eyes nor can anyone else for that matter. The pall bearers **stand still** as they do **not** know what to do. For anyone **other** than the official pall bearers to touch the bi-er is strictly **against** Jewish purity laws. Through touching the bi-er Jesus has become **ceremonially unclean** and **defiled**; yet, that does not seem to matter to him. **What** is going to happen next? **What** is he going to do? Then as a **hush and silence** comes over the crowd of people he speaks **7** words to my son. He says, “**Young man, I say to you, rise!**” Then my son **sits up** and **begins to speak**. Not **only** is my son’s life restored but so is his **health and his strength**. The pall bearers **quickly lower** the bi-er to the ground. We **cannot believe** what we have just seen right before our very eyes!!!

Jesus' **life-giving words** have the **power** to bring my son back to life. This man, **Jesus**, has **power over death!!!** **Who** is this man? He does **not** know me; yet, he **saw** me and had **compassion** on me! Now he has **raised** my son from the dead? God has truly been compassionate and blessed me and my son today. A **miracle** has just happened right here in front of us!!! The crowd is stunned and silent. When my son sat up I do **not even remember** what he said. It is all a **blur**, but that is **not** what is important. What is important is that **my son has been restored to life!!!!** *Glory be to God.* Then the most **wonderful** thing of all happened. Jesus gives my son back to me **alive!!** My son **gets up** off the bi-er and **embraces** me. Now what was just a few minutes ago tears of **sadness and grief** have been turned into tears of **joy and celebration**.

In all this **excitement and joy** I think that this is much like the story in the Old Testament where the widow's only son died and **Elijah cried out** to God to let the boy's life come back into him and **it did, it did** come back. Then Elijah gave the son back to the mother just like I got my son back. But today this man, Jesus, did not cry out to God. He simply spoke words over my son. This man **truly, truly** works miracles. He **not only** restores my son to life, but he **shows his compassion** to me a woman, a widow, he does not even know, and he reveals the kingdom of God right before all of our eyes. *Oh, what a blessed event.* How gracious and compassionate is our God. *God came near to us today to save my son from the*

power of death, to restore life, and to reveal himself as the man, Jesus, who shows compassion to me, a nameless widow, by raising my son from the dead.

I have to tell you, things **are not and cannot** be the same after this. As great as this miracle is for the crowd to see a **sense of fear** came over them. The crowd senses an **awareness of divine visitation** and the fact that they are all in the very presence of the glory of God through this event. **Everyone** here knows where this miracle came from. It is **God himself** who has come to help me. The crowd directs their **praise to God** well aware that **God's action of compassion and power to restore life** has granted this miracle here today. I know that Jesus' raising my son from the dead has **glorified God** and he did that in a spectacular way. The crowd is convinced that **Jesus is a great prophet** which has risen up among us with the miracle-working powers of Elijah and Elisha. Through God's grace they were the only two prophets that had **ever raised** anyone from the dead. **No one** since them has done that-**until today**. A **great prophet** has surely risen among us. I hear the crowd exclaim, "**God has looked favorably on his people.**" They are right. God has **certainly** visited us with his grace, he has brought **salvation** to my son, and he has come to be amongst us today that is for sure. What a blessed event has happened.

Life has been restored to both my son and I. This man, **Jesus, has saved me** from a life of powerlessness and helplessness. I have **hope again** and now even

though I am **still a widow** my house will not be *an empty house* now that my son is alive again. Word about this event will surely spread all over Judea and the surrounding countryside about what an **incredible miracle** Jesus has performed here. In this miracle today *God is identified with the action of this man, Jesus*. All **thanks and glory** be to God through Jesus' healing and saving works in the world.

MAY GOD THE FATHER, JESUS THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT BE WITH YOU ALL THIS WEEK AS GOD'S COMPASSION TOWARD YOU AND OTHERS GUIDES YOUR LIFE. AMEN.