

"When Grief Meets Hope" Luke 7:11-16 Trinity 16 2023

May the peace of God our Father rest with you this day. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we know that the ancient pagan civilizations had many gods. The pagans worshiped the gods of earth, wind, fire, rain, fertility, war, the sea, and so on. But they never worshiped a god called the "god of hope." Hope was a disappointing mirage in that ancient world, long before our Lord was born in Bethlehem. There is no hope for this sin-cursed world apart from the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. Paul identified Him as the "God of Hope" in Romans 15:13.

We know that Jesus came into the world to be the "lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," according to John 1:29. His presence was far more than the cross. He came to give life and hope. Let's look at an incident where He reveals His life-giving and hope-building abilities. Consider a time when grief met hope in our Gospel today from Saint Luke: 'Afterward he was on his way to a town called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd were traveling with him. Just as he neared the gate of the town, a dead man was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the town was also with her. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said, "Don't weep." Then he came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And he said, "Young man, I tell you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him

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to his mother. Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us," and "God has visited his people."

Every culture has its way of grieving. In the Hebrew culture, the nearest relative to the deceased would lead the procession to the cemetery. In this case, a widow leads her only son's procession ahead of the bier. As people witnessed the procession, they stopped their activities and joined. The crowd of mourners grew.

Jesus also led a crowd. He and His group met the widow and her crowd of mourners. Rather than step aside and join the procession, Jesus interrupted. He changed lives that day because He raised the widow's son from the dead. Why would He do that? Typically, we say things like: Jesus had compassion for the woman. She was a widow, and her son was her sole financial support. Those are true. Jesus is compassionate, but there must have been other women in a similar condition, and He did not resurrect them, as far as we know. Could He be teaching us something deeper?

Notice that in this case, Jesus did not touch the son's dead body. He only touched the pallet on which they the body. Jesus was likely practicing one of the purity laws. If He had touched a dead body, the act

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would have made Him unclean. But perhaps there is more to learn from this action.

This incident reminds me of Jesus' description of His return. We know after His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and then ascended back to His Father. He promised to judge the living and the dead. Matthew 16:27 reads, "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each according to what he has done."

Jesus' crowd reminds me of the angels that will accompany Him at His return. Jesus' return will be the fulfillment of hope to a weary world. He will accomplish the promise of our resurrection, just as He raised the widow's son. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout,, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words."

The crowds declared that Jesus was a "great prophet." He resurrected this man as Elijah and Elisha had done in their ministries. Jesus was more than a great prophet. He establishes His identity as THE

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prophet of whom the Lord told Moses, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."

Cultures grieve differently. Individuals also grieve differently. We can have in common the presence of Jesus and the hope of the resurrection. Then, we can embrace our grief rather than run from it.

It is essential to see the presence of Jesus in this story. He did not step aside and ignore the intense suffering of the widow. You can imagine how she must have felt losing first her husband, and now a son. We might expect to lose our spouse, but we don't expect to lose a child. The loss of a child must be one of the most challenging kinds of grief imaginable. Our parents, Adam and Eve, experienced it.

Jesus may not raise our loved ones today. However, He will raise them someday. Like the widow, the Lord is present with us in our most challenging times. He told her not to weep as He had something surprising and comforting in mind. Then He resurrected her son. Maybe Jesus has something special in mind for us in our grief. The time of our grief is the time we most need Him. He gives us comfort now and the hope of what is to come.

Don't give up on Jesus. He is ever near us. We can keep going because we know His promises and His presence. His love for us was so

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strong that He went to the cross and submitted Himself to death on a cross in order to mark us as redeemed. We have been washed clean in the blood of the lamb. Even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death in this broken, sinful world, He is ever near us. May this truth give you the strength to face what the world challenges you with, trusting in the sure hope of the resurrection that is yours in Christ. Amen.