

June 9, 2013
Pentecost 3

“Jesus Interrupts a Funeral Procession”

LUKE 7:11-17

Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out-- the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." ¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

It is against the law to interrupt a funeral procession as you are driving your car. The California Driver's Handbook specifically states, "**Do not** block or hinder a funeral procession. Vehicles taking part in a funeral procession have the right-of-way, and if you interfere, obstruct, or interrupt the funeral procession, you are subject to a citation (CVC §2817). Interrupting a funeral procession is not only against the law it also shows a lack of respect for the people who are mourning the loss of someone they love.

Jesus interrupted a funeral procession as it comes out of the city of Nain. The mourners are carrying the dead body of young man to its final resting place, the only son of a woman who had already lost her husband. Jesus interrupted the funeral procession because he wanted to raise the young man back to life and give him back to his mother.

Jesus loves to come to people and interrupt their lives. Think of how often he has come to you this past week and reminded you through the Holy Spirit how much he cares about you and loves you. Someday when Jesus returns in glory he will interrupt the world in which we are living. He will raise our bodies to life again just as he did with this young man who had died in the town of Nain.

The sad procession

"Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd of people went along with him." Jesus enjoyed walking through towns and villages talking about the goodness of the kingdom of God. He wanted people to see him as their King of kings and Lord of lords who had come to rescue them and save them. People followed Jesus because they loved his words and they wanted to hear how much he loved them and cared for them. Some followed Jesus because they were hoping to see another miracle. It says here that a large crowd of people were following Jesus as he approached the city of Nain.

The crowd of people following Jesus meets another crowd of people coming out of the gates of Nain. "As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out- the

only son of a mother and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.”

I have driven by the cemetery in Santa Maria and seen people gathering for the burial of someone who has died. The crowd may be small or the crowd may be large. Most often the body being placed into the ground is the body of an older person. Occasionally a young person dies from a car accident or cancer. About a year ago I attended the funeral of a young man who played water polo with my son. He died in his sleep of a brain aneurism. There was a large crowd of people in a large auditorium with standing room only. A large crowd of people from town of Nain followed the body of the young man as it was being carried to the grave.

It says that the funeral procession came out of the gates of the town. How different the towns were in those days. They had their own walls and they closed their gates at night. People lived in close proximity to one another. They went to the well together to draw water. They went to the market together. They shared each others problems and troubles. I grew up in a small town. If a young person died, the whole town showed up for the funeral as happened when my cousin Kathy died at the age of twenty one in a car accident.

We get the impression the people of the town highly regarded this young man and his mother. The crowd is large. You have heard it said, “The good die young.” A medical doctor once told me it seemed to him that it was the nicest people who often came down with cancer. Old people die. Young people die. Bad people die. Good people die. When Job lost his ten children he said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

How do parents survive the loss of a child? How sad this widow was when she lost her only son! What a joy he must have been for her. God’s ways are not our ways. A pastor lost his little son on Christmas Eve from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. He found peace and comfort in the words of John 3:16 “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...”

As long as we live on this earth, we will have to deal with the reality of death. Plants die. Pets die. People we love die. Death is all around us. The other day there were two packages of cat food at our front door with a note that the neighbor’s cat had passed away and they were giving us the food that was left over. It is tough to lose a pet you love to death, but much harder to lose a child or husband or wife or mom or dad.

We speak about death as “passing away.” We call the places we bury our dead a cemetery which means a resting place. Death always has a sting to it as we are told in 1 Corinthians 15, “The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law.” When death comes to our home we cannot say that God is punishing us for something we did wrong. Death and dying and pain and sorrow come because of Adam’s fall. The Lord God told Adam that the day he ate from the tree in the garden he would die. For some death comes easily. For others it is a lengthy and painful and prolonged process. Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death.

Because Jesus is both God and Man he experienced the sorrow that comes with death. It

says here, "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her." Jesus heart went out to her. Jesus wept when he saw the sorrow in his friends Mary and Martha because their brother Lazarus died. Jesus cares about us when we lose someone we love. As we sing in the hymn, "What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear. Jesus knows our every weakness, Take to the Lord in prayer." Jesus sits at the right hand of the heavenly Father. He promises to send us the Holy Spirit to be our comforter. He already knows how he will comfort you and strengthen you when you personally walk through the valley of the shadow of death, or see someone you love pass through the doors of death. "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus."

We are about to see a huge collision take place in front of the gates of Nain. The Lord of life is on a collision course with our archenemy death. Jesus will be victorious.

The glorious victory

"When Jesus saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'" When you see someone crying because they have lost someone they love please don't say, "Don't cry." They have every reason to cry because of what their enemy of death has brought into their lives. This woman had already lost her husband. Now she loses the only child she has. She loses the son she loves so dearly. Jesus has every right to tell her "Don't cry" because he is about to raise her son to life again and bring tears of joy into her life.

"Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still." Jesus touched the coffin. He interrupted the funeral procession. He wants everyone to see first hand what he is going to do to this enemy of death. Death will meet its match by the hand of Jesus that touches the coffin.

The words of Jesus have such amazing power and strength. "He said, 'Young man I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother." Recall how Jesus spoke to the dead body of Lazarus that had been in grave for four days. It says in John 11, "When he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus come out.'" He took the hand of a young girl who died and said, "Young girl I say to you get up."

When someone dies their body ceases to function. The heart stops beating. The blood stops flowing. The brain no longer sends messages. The eardrum no longer vibrates from sound waves. The little hair like nerves in the cochlea stop picking up the sounds and sending them to the brain. The brain no longer interprets the sounds and responds to them. Jesus speaks to the young man and he hears the words of Jesus. The words of Jesus suddenly bring life back into the body. In a split second of time the heart starts beating, the blood flows, the brain works and the ears hear.

So it will be when Jesus returns in clouds of glory. There will be the shout of an archangel and the loud sound of trumpet. In John 5 Jesus tells us not to be amazed at the bodily resurrection that will take place on the last day. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out..." 1 Corinthians 15 says that this bodily resurrection will happen in a moment in the twinkling of an eye. The young man sat up. The Greek word for "resurrection" means literally to stand up

again. We will stand up again and walk around in the new heaven and new earth Jesus has prepared for us.

The people were filled with great joy when they saw what Jesus had done. "They were all filled with awe and praised God, 'A great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people.'" Jesus gave the boy back to his mother. Tears of sadness are replaced with tears of joy just as it will be when Jesus returns and raises us to life again. I am looking forward to seeing my parents and dear members of this church and great saints from the past in the bodily resurrection on the last day.

Dear Christian you are so blessed to have Jesus in your life. He has interrupted you and shocked you by showing you the truth about the sin that separates you from your God. He has interrupted you and shocked you with the good news he has done everything necessary to save you. He has connected you to his death and burial and resurrection through faith and your baptism. Jesus interrupted the funeral outside the town of Nain. Jesus will someday come again and raise us to life. That's our great hope. Amen.