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Third Sunday After Pentecost

And Are We Yet Alive?

Luke 7: 11 - 17

God loves you and so do I!

In today's Gospel lesson one thing is clear. When the heart of a mourner is split with grief - Jesus walks in through the gap, to heal both visible and invisible wounds - to bring what was lost back to life again.

As the story goes, Jesus is on a sort of road trip and happens upon a funeral procession. After healing a slave at Capernaum, Jesus traveled on with his disciples and a large crowd to Nain. The grief filled procession was crowded by people in the streets as a widow was leading at the bier. It was the custom of the day for the bereaved mother to walk in front of the procession. She leads the procession toward the final resting place of death, the grave.

It was her procession as well. It wasn't only her son that had died. In a way, her life had ended as well. As a widow, her son was her future. Her son was the one to care for her affairs. Her son managed her inheritance. Without her son, she would have nothing. Widows held a tenuous position in Jesus' day. They were often linked to orphans as those without provision in Jewish society. Women lived under the protection of their husbands household. After the death of a husband, it was customary for the brother or other relative of the deceased to marry the widow. In cases where no male relative from the family of her husband was available, the widow moved to the margins of society and fell vulnerable to alienation and exclusion from the community. This led to the simple denial of familial care. Further, the death of an only son would leave a widow without an heir and therefore unable to retain whatever means remained for her. Without an heir, all personal property reverted to the husbands family after his death. So as she was walking and weeping, mourning the death of her son, there was a sort of 'dying' that was taking place in her as well. And we've all known those who are physically living, but are dead in spirit.

Like the spouse who says the wrong thing and gets slapped across the face and ends up in a cycle of abuse - physically living, but dead in spirit. Like the child wrongly diagnosed

for ADHD taking the wrong medicine, physically living, but dead in spirit. Like parents still waiting on an explanation of why their soldier did not return home, physically living, but dead in spirit. Like the teenager who is socially bullied through social media, physically living, but dead in spirit.

Straight into this physically living but dead in spirit situation - Jesus said to woman "Do not weep." Then he came forward at touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. He said to the young man, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" What followed was a deeply compassionate response to both suffering both seen and hidden. We see the suffering of a woman at the loss of her son. What we do not see is the suffering of a widow who has lost everything. It is to this deeper suffering - this absolute loss - that Jesus speaks.

And are we yet alive?

You see, Jesus cares about your deeper suffering and those losses that you think are absolute. Jesus cares if you are physically living but dead in Spirit. This is to what Jesus speaks. What moves me about this passage and so many other passages concerning the ministry of Jesus is that Jesus walks into a situation and accepts it just as it is. You see - we often try to straighten things out before letting Jesus in, don't we. We'll let Jesus in after we quit weeping and after we seem to have gotten it together. But Jesus enters in despite our efforts to keep him away and he sees through our masks - and in this passage, even though he sees a dead son - he also sees life. Even though he encounters a hopeless widow - he sees provision.

Jesus is moved by the presence of death embodied by this woman and has compassion. What is compassion? There are many definitions out there. The Charter for Compassion says that "Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect."

We see this compassion throughout scripture. The same compassion the Good Samaritan has for the man robbed, stripped, beaten, and left half dead on the road (Luke 10:33). The same compassion the father has for the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). Think about your life for a moment - and all those times you have been shown compassion. In all of these cases, both in

scripture and in life, compassion for the one in need is the impetus toward action.

This mother and widow, leading her own funeral, is like the one lying on the road beat up and left to die or like the one lost in need of being found. She has a body but it is clear that she is dead. The compassion of God will not allow God to passively stand still in the face of death. So Jesus touches the bier, violating Jewish purity laws (Numbers 19:11, 16). He takes the risk and breaks the religious rules for the life of another. He touches death and transforms it into life because when he tells the young man to rise, “the dead man sat up and began to speak.” But his mother, the widow, never says a word. She never says “alleluia” or “thank you, Jesus” or “praise the Lord.” She is silent yet Jesus knows exactly what she desires. God knows what we need before we even ask.

Jesus “gave [the man] to his mother”(cf. 1 Kings 17:23). The death she died because of her son’s death was demolished. In giving her “only son” back to her, Jesus not only gave her back economic security and stability, he gave her back her life. Jesus tells the son to rise but the mother rises as well. Her dead son and with him, her dead hopes, were made alive again. Her dreams for the future were restored when Jesus gave him back to her. What she had lost was found. The living funeral was over. A relationship she thought that would never be resurrected came back to life and returned to her.

All it takes is one touch from Jesus to do it. God wants to give you back your life. Just when you thought your life was over. Just when you made all of the funeral arrangements for your life, Jesus has one more compassionate move, one more loving word—“rise!” A hope thought dead. A relationship thought eternally severed. An intervention thought never to work. Jesus has compassion for you. Rise, and live!

Why? Because Jesus became that son that died. He was crucified, died, and rose again, taking all of our stuff to the grave with him, and rising so that we could experience new and everlasting life. The compassion of God did not stand still. The compassion of God is resurrected!

When the heart of a mourner is split with grief - Jesus walks in through the gap, to heal both visible and invisible wounds - to bring what was lost back to life again. As we prepare to come to the table today...think about yourself for a moment. Ask yourself this question: Am I really

living? Do I need to hear the voice of Jesus say “Rise?” And also think about those whom you know are alive but are not really living. Receive this sacrament as a prayer for them, show them compassion, and may we all be filled with the hope of resurrection!

And are we yet alive? May we live this day.

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.