

***Everything Depends on Resurrection***

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

September 24, 2023

Luke 7:11–17

Today's Gospel reading is straightforward enough, a young man who has died is raised back to life by the Lord. This appears to be the central thing happening. But time spent in this passage shows that the young man is not at the center of the story. It is his mother. This really is more about her than it is about the son she has lost.

When Jesus enters the town of Nain He finds her distraught. She is a widow and now her only son has died. The response of the people in her town is overwhelming. They are all there to support her in her grief. Her young son is being carried out to be buried. She is overcome with sorrow and the emotion is pouring out of her. Jesus tells her what none of us should ever tell someone who has lost a loved one: Do not weep.

Jesus is not heartless or cavalier. On the contrary, He is overcome with compassion for her. He tells her not to weep because He knows what He will do. He will replace her tears with her son. He will restore him to life. This is not so much about the son as it is about her. Jesus is doing this for her, to remove her sorrow and replace it with joy. When Jesus raises this young man to life He gives him back to her. She has her son once again.

But upon even further reflection, this ultimately isn't about her. She was the recipient of a fantastic miracle. But along with Matthew, Mark, and John, Luke is really showing us who Jesus is. This account of the resurrection of this young man is not really about him, nor about his mother, but about Jesus. Up to this point in his Gospel account Luke has been showing that Jesus has come in fulfillment of the promises in the Old Testament of the Savior to come. All the things He is doing is bringing this about, including this miracle of raising a person to life.

The people there see this as well. They glorify God. They marvel that "a great prophet has risen among us" and that "God has visited His people." The reference to a great prophet being raised up is from God's promise to Moses in Deuteronomy 18 that He will raise up among the people a prophet that is unlike any other. Luke is showing us here that this very promise is being brought about. It is being accomplished in the person of Jesus. Raising a person from the dead certainly shows it!

God visiting His people is reminiscent of the words of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. When John was born Zechariah prayed one of the most beautiful prayers in all the Bible. It begins this way: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. Zechariah praises God that He has visited and redeemed His people. How He has done so is by coming in the flesh. Zechariah's son John the Baptist was sent to pave the way for Him, Jesus Christ. So here Jesus is, bringing a man to life and the people recognize that God is visiting His people. He is coming to them in the flesh.

So it's really about Jesus, isn't it? This is parallel with two other people who were raised from the dead in the Old Testament, one with the prophet Elijah and the other the prophet Elisha. We heard the one of Elijah in the Old Testament reading this morning. The woman, like the woman in Nain, was a widow. And now her boy, her only child, has died. She cried out to the prophet Elijah in despair. Remember we heard last week that she and her son were going to die because there was a famine and she had run out of food. But Elijah revealed to her that God would sustain them by the food not running out. But all of this only now for her son to die?

Notice what Elijah does. He prays to God. He asks God to restore the boy to life. Elijah is a prophet, and he accomplished many amazing things in his ministry. But bringing someone back to life? No one can do that. Only God can. And so Elijah called upon God and God did indeed raise this boy to life.

Jesus is a prophet, as we have seen. But He is more, He is the prophet, the one promised in Deuteronomy 18. He is God Himself. He went up to that coffin and touched it. He can by His own power raise the dead to life. He spoke to that man, "Get up." Dead people cannot hear. But God has power to bring about hearing and so Jesus in speaking to him brought about the ability to hear. Jesus is God. He raises the dead. This is about Him.

On one level it is about this young man who had died and now was raised back to life. But it is more than just about him. It is about his mother. Jesus gives comfort to her and gives her back her son. Even so, we see that it ultimately is not about her but about the Lord Himself. In bringing about this miracle He has shown Himself to be the Son of God and the prophet who would be raised up, that is, the very Messiah, the very Savior, the Lord Himself.

But if we stop here we don't fully see what this is all about. Upon even further reflection we see that this is about someone else as well. That is you. This is about you. This is not just about a young man being raised to life. It is about resurrection. Everything depends on it. For the man, he had life again. For his mother, she had her son back again. For Jesus, it was fulfilling the promise of the Savior. He raised people from the dead. But He did something even greater. He Himself rose from the dead. Everything depends on that. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ has not been raised then our faith is in vain, we are of all people to be pitied.

Because He rose we know we have life forever. Because He rose we know that resurrection is real and that it will happen on the last day. The people of God before He came believed it. On the last day all people will rise from their graves. This is bodily resurrection. You will die. But you will also live. Your body will be raised and you will live forever with God and with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. This is about you, you will step forth from your grave on the last day.

But this is not even all of it. This is not just something you wait for. It's good to know that it will happen! But you in fact have already died and have been raised up to new life. The Bible speaks of resurrection not only as bodily resurrection on the last day but also of spiritual life that you are given even now. This happened in your Baptism. Paul says in Romans 6 that in Baptism you were brought into the death of Christ so that just as He was raised to new life you too are raised up to new and eternal life. Everything depends on this, your resurrection you have already experienced. You live even as you are coming toward your death at some point. You live not to yourself but to your Lord who has brought you into His death and resurrection in your Baptism.

If you are dead you can't do anything. But you are not dead, you are alive. You have been raised with Christ in Baptism and will live forever. The life you live you live in Christ. Everything depends on Him. His resurrection guarantees yours on the last day. Amen.

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