

Rev. Silas Hasselbrook  
Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity  
Lk. 7:11-17

In the name of Jesus; Amen.

What the Gospel reading for this morning does is make clear-cut and apparent two realities of our existence: death and life. Death doesn't happen just at the end, just like life doesn't happen just at the beginning. They are both there, contending, grappling with each other. Even in the pleasant and warm air of late summer, leaves start turning color and dying. In a bustling city like Milwaukee, with exciting projects going on, sports teams in full swing, hundreds of thousands of people living together, there are still sirens, stolen cars, and gunshots. In the live-giving relationships we live in, as father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, husband, wife we still fight, say hurtful words, get angry in our hearts. In our beautiful vocations and hobbies, work can still be a drag at times, coworkers and bosses are insensitive, and projects never turn out perfect. When things don't go as they ought and sinful things happen, that is death. When we don't live out the Commandments, the way God wanted us to live, then we live out death instead.

As you can see, death is close to each of us. No one of you is further from death than another. Someone in their old age may have more health issues, but younger people are not exempt. An accident, poor judgment, natural disaster, and many other things can claim anyone's life at any time. Death is always lurking. From the day you were born, you came with an expiration date. From the day you were brought into this world, there is a day when you will be taken out of it. And it is getting closer and closer every hour. Our daily sins, which are little deaths, remind us that we are mortal.

What does Jesus have to say about our predicament? What does He do in the face of death? Jesus strides right on over to it. He will not let it slink away or run rampant. He sees how it has terribly afflicted the grieving mother, the widow who is now left in the world with no one to provide for her, who would likely be ignored after the funeral was over. She lost her beloved husband, now she has lost her only-begotten son. Perhaps this young man was in the prime of his life. He is certainly missed by his mother which seems to suggest that he was kind and caring. There is a large crowd in the funeral procession, suggesting that he was well-known, respected, and successful. Another tragic case of death snuffing out those in the bloom of youth. Perhaps the widowed mother cannot understand why God would allow such a thing. Maybe the words of

the woman in the OT reading were on her lips, “What have I to do with you, O God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?” Those closest and dearest to her are gone. She weeps bitterly. Jesus sees her and has compassion. There is that important word again. It is a churning of the stomach, it is a pouring out of inward emotion, it is entering into suffering with another and doing something to help them.

Jesus, heading up the crowd of his disciples and many others, meets the procession of death coming from the city. The procession of life and death meet. Jesus makes the procession of death stand still. The merciless march of death is halted. Christ Jesus is the only one who can command it by His authority to stand still. The dead man and Jesus Christ come face to face. Death and life meet. Christ was not asked by anyone to do this. No one invited Him to become involved. But Jesus could not help it. When He sees the ravages of death, He does something about it. He won't let it slink away. He won't permit it to go its way. This procession is of a dead man leading dying people to the grave. Jesus must stop that, as a prelude of what He will do to all graves. Jesus has come to lead the dead out of the grave, to be the life that leads those alive in the Spirit to everlasting life. He has compassion toward those who are dead and dying. This is His whole mission to the world.

Jesus is not overwhelmed by the evil of death. Neither does He make light of it by turning the occasion into an opportunity for humor or empty platitudes. He halts the procession of death, He tells the distraught mother, “Do not weep.” He goes to the coffin. And He touches death. To touch the coffin meant that Jesus risked becoming ritually unclean by Jewish standards. But here is Christ, the life of the world, becoming a sponge for the tears of the widow and absorbing the death of the son. He touches the coffin and says, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And he does. He sits up. I believe in the resurrection of the body.

Jesus doesn't ask the mother to stop crying, or request the son to rise. These are not suggestions. Jesus' words are commands that One can give only if He has power over death, and power to give life. He has the authority and power to reverse death. Jesus' own resurrection is so wonderful that He can't help but raise the dead before He Himself is raised. His Easter triumph is so joyful and complete that it pours out even to the time before His resurrection: to Elijah and the woman's son, to Elisha and the Shunnamite woman's son, to Jairus daughter, to Lazarus, to this young man of Nain. This miracle shows us that there will be a day, at the end of the world, where Christ will halt the great funeral procession that moves forward all over the world. He will

bring the dead back to life, heal all wounds which death has made, reunite all whom death has separated.

Jesus could have easily raised the son with the power of His word alone. He did not have to take hold of the coffin. But He does to show you that it is in His very body where salvation is located. It is in contact with His body that we have life. The flesh and blood of Jesus is the location of our life. And so we take hold of His flesh and blood for our life, we receive here the medicine of immortality, the Supper that pours into our body and soul the everlasting life of God in Christ.

All people who saw this were in great awe and glorified God. “A great prophet has arisen among us!” If only the people knew. Jesus was not simply a great prophet, but the Savior of the world. He has not simply arisen among His people, but must be raised up on the cross among sinners. There the only-begotten, not of the widow, but of God Himself would die for our sin and death. The raising of the widow’s son happens as Jesus and His disciples journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus will confront death on the cross, and bring life to all in His Resurrection. Here we have a foretaste of the confrontation to come. On the cross, death and life will contend in a stupendous battle. But the prince of life will reign. He will win the day. The report about Jesus raising this young man goes out to all the region around Him. It must, even as it does today. This message, this Gospel of Christ’s victory over death must go out to all the world, for this earth is a broken one filled with dying people in need of life.

But here is a difficulty for us. How is it that Christ has abolished death and gained victory over it if we still end up dying anyway? The wages of sin is death, as St. Paul says, and we, though made alive in the Spirit, are sinners until the grave. But also consider that God is our Father. He would not be doing us a favor by immediately removing us from suffering and death. That what He shows us in Jesus. We are to pass through crosses and death just like Christ. In the life of Jesus, God teaches us that salvation comes after suffering and death, indeed that even in our suffering and death God gives us life in His Son. He is teaching us how to trust and love Him even in the midst of sin and death. And if we trust Him so, don’t we trust Him even more in giving us everlasting life? Yes, Jesus has touched every part of our human condition, He has made it holy, even the tomb. Christ has claimed your life to be His because He lived your life perfectly and suffered for your death-filled life.

Now, in Jesus, death is not a bookend to our existence. We do not die here on earth only to be inevitably thrown into eternal death. No longer does death loom over us and have the last laugh. When Jesus died and rose again, something happened to death. Your Savior transformed it. Now it is the portal to life eternal, the gate to heaven itself. This is what makes your faith and life different than all other people: that you have hope in Christ who will raise you from the dead and bring you to heaven. It is a hope that diffuses your life even now, and speaks a blessed and vibrant message to a dying world in need of it.

But we do not have to wait until we leave this world to bask in the victory of Jesus. You have life even now. Look back to the Epistle reading. There are so many references about God's grace and life being *in* you: that you may "be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man," "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith," "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God," and God "according to the power at work within us" is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. Dear saints of God, Christ, the life, is in you. He has planted the seed of life and immortality in you in your Baptism. The seed of life is ever growing and will overcome the seed of death that you received from Adam. In your Baptism, God did far better than Elijah, who stretched himself over the boy three times in order to give the child life. Rather, Christ gives you His life, the one that passes through death to life, as God stretches His three-fold name over you: "Father, Son, Holy Spirit."

But that is not all. Though we are all dying, though we will all die, remember where life is to be found. Remember how Jesus spoke the life-giving word to the young man *and* touched the coffin. Remember that life and salvation are in His very body given you for. Where His body is, there is life. He gives us His body and blood here every week to water the seed of life within you, to assure you that you are His and He will raise you from the dead, and to give you life even now as He comes here to touch our dying bodies with His life-giving one. Here we are forgiven for the death we participate in during our lives, and here we receive life to do better.

Jesus and His disciples were journeying to Jerusalem when this miraculous raising of the widow's son occurred. They were journeying with their Lord to death, and as their lives attested, through death, into the life He claims for them, for you. See your life as a journey with your Lord. You follow Him on the journey toward death, trusting in His care for you. You prepare yourself for death by confessing your sins, receiving forgiveness, and by His life-giving Word and altar. You die with Him, knowing that He will one day touch your coffin and say to you,

“My dear child, rise.” You will sit up in your coffin and sing the praises of God, knowing that all pain here on earth is as nothing for the joy and peace you have. You will step out of death into the glory prepared for you who love him and are loved by Him. “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come...” You will pass through death into life. “I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; Amen.