

June 13 Luke 7:11-17

I didn't make the papers today...but Sharon Heindl did. She was 57, the same age as I. You didn't make the papers today, but William Frey did. He was 70. None of your children were in the papers today. But Wendy Fifield did. She was only 34. I'm reading names from the obituaries of this past Friday's Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. All the articles try to give some sense of purpose to the few years the deceased had spent on earth by reliving some of the accomplishments of the one who made the papers that day. We'll all make the papers some day. We wonder, "God, why did you make us, only to live and laugh and love and then suffer pain and die?" How do you deal with death?

Let's go to the town of Nain. We meet two processions. One is joyful and hopeful, following Jesus. His teachings and miracles left no doubt God had finally come! The other procession is sad and hopeless, following a coffin. The corpse of a young man was wrapped in a cloth and then carried on what we today would call a stretcher. His mother is crying. She's been here before having buried her husband some time earlier. Now her only son would join his father in the tomb, and she was all alone. A large crowd of people walked with this grieving mother toward the graveyard. But what could they say to soften her grief? How could they deal with death?

Luke records that when Jesus saw the young man's mother, "**His heart went out to her.**" God knew her sorrow. Jesus urged her, "Don't cry." Or translated literally, "Stop sobbing." Then He spoke to the corpse, as if the dead man were just sleeping, "Young man I say to you, get up!" He immediately sat up and talked. Imagine that woman's tears of joy when Jesus gave her son back to her!

Unbelievers ridicule the Scripture's revelation that every dead body will rise again. "How do you know what's beyond the grave? Have you been there?" they cynically ask. No, we haven't been there. But we know Someone who has. Jesus. He lived in heaven and came down to earth to reveal what lies beyond the grave. He declares in John 5, "**A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.**" When God speaks, things happen. In the beginning He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. "Let the land produce living creatures, according to their kinds..." and they were there, dogs and cats and horses and cows. When Christ speaks, things happen, for He is true God. "Young man, I say to you, 'Get up!'" and he did!

To be sure, death is a powerful enemy. No human skill or power can overcome it. I recall being at the funeral of a 13-year old girl, and the minister, who represented a very liberal church body, commented, "God loved her. I don't know why she died." I nearly raised my hand to ask him to read Romans 6:23, where God tells us why we all die. "**The wages of sin is death.**" So we will all join a funeral procession taking loved ones to the grave. Death will eventually strike us. We'll all make the papers. Does that send a chill down your spine? It ought to. Death is such a terrible thing because it is the just punishment God pronounced upon disobedient and rebellious human beings. Death is a separation. We are all by nature spiritually dead, our souls separated from knowledge of the true God. We all physically die when our soul leaves our body. Eternal death, the separation of body and soul from God's presence in hell's eternal torment is the ultimate wages of sin.

How can we deal with death? Some go into denial. They claim it is just a part of nature, and there is no life beyond the grave. So they make jokes at funerals or try to turn it into a big party or celebration to try to soften the sting of death. Some suggest the Bible's teaching of the resurrection is a metaphor about nature awakening in spring. Some suggest that eternal life is when the dead live on in the memory of others. Some suggest, "If we live right, God will reward us with heaven." Now that

sounds good, but it simply isn't true. The fact that people who seem so good still die proves that we are sinners and that our righteousness just doesn't cut it before God. So nothing in this world can help us deal with death: Not all the riches and pleasures of this world, not the fond memories of the one who died, not the sympathetic words of friends.

So how can we deal with death? What Jesus did at Nain indicates clearly He came to deliver us from death. Since the wages of sin is death, Jesus' entire mission on earth focused on taking away our sin. He took on Himself the responsibility to make up for our sins by living a perfect life and to pay the punishment of our sin by dying on the cross. Did it work? On the third day He rose from the grave, victorious over sin, death, and hell. All whom the Holy Spirit unites to Jesus by faith receive the gift of eternal life He won. At death the soul of all who trust in Jesus departs to be with Christ in heaven. On the Last Day Jesus will wake up the bodies of all who have ever lived, and those who trusted in Him will be glorified with Him, body and soul reunited in heaven. Here's how we deal with death - through faith in Christ, for we know the dead in Christ shall live!

How will you thank Jesus for the gift of life? Look how the people at Nain responded. **"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.'"** There was no question about life after death at the city gate of Nain. The youth who had died sat up alive. Wow! How could they not glorify God for sending the Savior?

Now it would be a wonder to see a dead person become alive, but is it not just as wonderful to see people spiritually dead, dead in transgressions and sins, become spiritually alive, to believe in and serve the living God, of whom they were once ignorant and whom they once hated? The Holy Spirit has performed a great miracle in you and me, sinners born anew to become children of God! Through Jesus we live physically, spiritually, eternally. He will raise our bodies and glorify them on the Last Day. Won't we then make every effort to use our bodies to glorify Jesus now? Won't we daily repent of sin and daily, by faith in Christ, live as new people following God's will, not the devil's or the world's or our sinful flesh's? It may seem like an oversimplification, but you can ask a simple question about everything you do – "Can I do this to glorify Jesus?" Won't we teach our children of their Savior? The early Christians taught their children to place their hands on their chests for emphasis when they confessed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body – this body!" Won't we show our joy and speak of the Savior to everyone we can? Won't we also see to it that the news of Jesus goes throughout the entire world? **"God has come to help His people!"**

Sometimes the things of this life detract us from the real life we have in Christ. Some people, despite a strong Christian upbringing, give up the faith in favor of a lifestyle the world offers that seems more gratifying, rewarding, or pleasurable. Or as they bear suffering, they despair of life in Christ.

Will you turn away from Jesus? We can see a great future ahead for all who believe in Christ, and we want to hang on to that life by continuing in the Word and Sacrament and life of Christ's church. So when you become tired, and life seems to have lost its purpose, look ahead to the great future which God has prepared for all who believe in His Son, Jesus. Live with joy, peace, confidence, hope, and Christ-like love. And when someone asks you why you can be so optimistic in a world made pessimistic by death, tell him, "Through faith in Jesus I can deal with death. The dead in Christ shall live. By faith in Christ I live with new power to Jesus' glory." Amen.