

Trinity 16, 2017  
Jesus Touched the Bier

Luke 7:11-17

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, Or

By Rev. Mr. Bill Baker

*“Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.”*

Mother and child...today's gospel message is carved out of a relationship between a mother and her son. We feel the emotional tone Luke sets as we sympathize or even empathize with a mother, who, doing the best she can to raise a child on her own, has to come to terms with death. Not just any death, but the death of her son. Through out the scriptures we are continually reminded of our human condition...our frailties. Illnesses come, interventions needed, deaths abrupt stop. Jesus was no stranger to pain and heartache. Through this episode in Nain we see a revelation of things to come in the life and death of Jesus himself. The humanity in Jesus related to this grieving mother, as his own mother would soon grieve herself. And so, *“When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.”* How do we not weep in the face of so tragic a situation? The urge can be, at times, overwhelming. Jesus is not saying that we should not mourn, for he himself wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. It is not that we should refrain from weeping in times of tragedy, but that we should also rest in the compassion of the Lord by holding tight to our faith as we experience the tragic course of sin.

In your pain, in your heartaches, in the anxieties that we all must face, Jesus wants us to remember that he has entered the gates of our hearts and his compassion rests within each of us. He says to us “weep not” as he wipes away our tears and in holy compassion...he mourns along with us. But, this is not the finale! After Christ enters the gate, *“he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, young man, I say unto thee, ARISE.”* Arise...can you imagine standing there in the midst of this? Can this be true?! And then we realize, we begin to understand, there is life after death because there is eternal life found in Christ Jesus!...not in Muhammad, not in Gandhi, not in personal beliefs.

Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which all creation comes and all creation returns. Without His creation, what purpose would God have? God's purpose is found in us and it is His love that underlies all that is ultimately good; and this love cannot exist without its sharing. We all feel that. Everyday we experience either love coming in or the pleasure of love going out. In an act of compassion, love flowed from Jesus as he touched the bier and in response joy abounded and love was returned. *"And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother."* Incredible! Death overcome by Jesus.

A day also lies ahead for Jesus when his own humanity will be raised to new life and returned to his mother; and not to her only, but to all mankind, through out all ages. The mother Jesus is returned to?...the universal church of all believers. As Jesus was raised from the dead he too spoke and ignited his church to be the nurturing mother of all, under the guidance force of the Father's will. The Church...the Universal Church of all believers, The church...the children of God. The church...the mother of us all. *"And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited his people."* Oh how glorious it is to see the light of Christ.

The church is a sanctuary where the light of God rests to heal the broken and downtrodden, where those dead in Christ are raised to new life and the pain of sin is put into perspective. In Proverbs 17:22 we read, *"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones."* The Church, like a mother, offers all the love it can to encourage and make the heart merry. Jesus had compassion on us while were yet sinners, and he touched the bier and told us we can walk with Him once again. Church is where we need to be; church is where we find the inner strength of God resting in each of us and Jesus reaching out to touch our inner biers, purifying our hearts and souls for our eternal redemption.

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The climax of this scriptural episode can be seen most clearly from the Cross. Jesus, being led to Calvary will be the intercessory that will

reunite mother and son...dead humanity with the living church, and in the process the widow will be reconciled to the husband...the church back into the arms of God, and the only child will once again have a father.

Nailed to the Cross, Jesus looks down: *“When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing by, who he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”*

(John 19:26-27); a son given back to his mother, dead humanity given back to the universal church of God Almighty. It was only the work of God in the person of Jesus Christ who could reunite such a breach. We are no longer the children of a broken home. Jesus Christ going to his own death touches the bier...mankind is revived, the church is born and the father is back in the picture.

The church is not a Sunday exercise to be sought for ceremony or entertainment. Church is an active family who worship because of the love of Christ that resides within. What lives matter? Jesus said it best when he died for ALL...When we release ourselves from being judgmental, at that brief moment, we can see that the potential for the kingdom is in everyone. The man on the bier revived by Jesus...was you, he was the homeless man asking you for a dollar, he was the Chaplin who sat with you when your daughter passed away, he is the thief stealing formula to feed their child.

Pain and heartache may besiege us, but the love of God has reached out and touched us...it is time to stand up and live lives that are engaged with the gift of eternal life. We can push through the pain, the uncertainty, and rest in the joy of our reconciliation with our Father in heaven. Jesus shed his most precious blood and in return gave us His undying love. Come to the Table of the Lord knowing that in His sacrificial death you have been given eternal life!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.