

Sermon Trinity 16 2020

September 27, 2020

Luke 7:11-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

As we look around us right now, as we look especially in view of the coronavirus, something that the virus has forced us to acknowledge is mortality. I say this periodically, but one thing we do in our culture is sanitize mortality. We treat it as if it's non-existent. You look on TV and in our entertainment and we glorify this active lifestyle which is all sunshine and health, but we don't like to acknowledge that the ultimately reality for all of us is death. In view of that we have hospitals where we take the sick—don't get me wrong, this is a good thing for those in need of care, but this takes away the confrontation with the challenges of death. The same goes for the dying process itself. And this makes many unable or unwilling to deal with that reality.

As we look at the Old Testament, I think this gives us some insight, however. If you've ever read the books of the Law which contain verse after verse of how to deal with this circumstance or that, with this sacrifice or that washing, then you might remember in the midst of that how there is this aspect where when anyone comes in contact with death, they become unclean. And we hear that and we say, "Why?" For example you even have language about dead animals falling on objects and those things being unclean. On the one hand we might be inclined to argue that this is a realization, or even a revelation, of what we call germ theory. However, we can't take the theology of out of it. This is because death isn't the way it's supposed to be. When God created the world in the beginning, He created life and it was good. It was very good. Then sin came and death with it. And death is not good.

However, death is now our experience, and like I said, coronavirus is forcing us to be confronted with it. In view of that I think it's good for us to remember that even though death is not good, even though, as Paul says, death is our enemy, we have the One who has power over death: Jesus. As we see Jesus in the Gospel Lesson we see this power. There is this son of this widow. He has died and she's left alone, and Luke tells us that Jesus has compassion on her. And then what? He touches the bier, the casket, and He speaks, "**Young man, I say to you, arise.**" And what happens? When Jesus speaks, that Word does what it says. This case is no different. The young man sits up in the bier, and he starts talking. Those of you that watch my devotions heard

me say this there too, but it's not like the guy was not really dead, but the town thought he was, and Jesus said this and coincidentally the man started stirring and eventually was nursed back to health. No, this is full death to full life. Full lack of breath—as it says in the Old Testament Lesson—full lack of breath to sitting up and using breath to talk.

So what, then? Then this Jesus is the One who has power over death. This Jesus has power such that you don't have to worry and fear death. We have all of hullabaloo around us with COVID-19 telling you that you must be afraid, but Jesus says, "No. No, you don't have to be afraid." Why not? Because despite the fact that death is our enemy, by the work of Jesus, by His life, by His death, by His victorious resurrection, death is now a useful servant. For you Christian, death is the passage from this life of suffering to your eternal joy of being with our Lord.

And as I say that, it's interesting how death is philosophized by so many. I did a search this week, actually looking for a quote that I'd heard a number of times, the quote that says that we as Christians should fear death as little as we fear crawling into our beds. Well, I'm pretty sure I've read that somewhere in Luther. Unfortunately, I couldn't find it, but in that search I found a page with all these quotes about death. Interestingly, a huge majority of them were in that vein. It was that vein that tells us not to fear death. But what was sad is how many of them were from authors who weren't Christian. Now, you might think that's odd that I would mourn that, but let me explain. Why is that sad? It's sad because outside of the Christian faith, there is no assurance that one will receive a life after death that is an improvement over this life. But for you as a Christian, you have that assurance. You have that promise that as Jesus entered this world as He came and touched death for you, you have the promise of life in Him.

In fact, look at how Jesus touches that bier in the story. He reaches up and stands over the cleanliness laws of the Old Testament, and He touches death. But does it make Him unclean? No. That touch cleanses even death. Now death is the place where you live. Jesus takes that ill of death and joins it to Himself to take it away from you.

I'm reminded of the movie the Green Mile. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but there's a character in it by the name of John Coffey. No coincidence, I'm sure that his initials are J.C. But this John Coffey has the ability to heal people. And as he does this healing, he'll touch them. When their sickness has left them, then John will

breathe out a stream of what looks like black smoke and flies. He's taken the ill into himself, and cleansed the person. That's your Lord, He has taken your ill upon Himself, died for it on the cross, and left it in His tomb in His resurrection.

And your comfort, Christian, is that He has joined you to that resurrection. When you were baptized, you died and were raised. Hear that again. You don't need to fear death because you already died. When you were baptized, you died. You died and your sins were buried with Jesus. Then you were raised. You were joined to His resurrection. So now you're alive. You're not alive in the way you were before, you're alive in the Spirit, alive in Jesus; alive by faith in Him.

Now, as I say that, I know that I have heard many express their fear of dying, and I hope that addresses that fear. I also know that many will say, "Pastor, I'm not afraid of dying, I'm afraid of something else."

I don't know if you all had a chance to look at the Lutheran Witness that came this month. It was on the topic of the *Ars Moriendi*, "The Art of Dying Well." It's really well done. I suggest you read it. What it references is the understanding in the Middle Ages that one really capped off their existence by facing death the right way. To be clear, it's not advocating Medieval view, per se. However, it is advocating how we understand death. In fact, as I said that about being afraid of something else, it lists a myriad of fears that people have when it comes to death. It references the coronavirus and death; it references our fear because of sins, because of the unknown nature and finality of death; it references many other things too.

But some of the references are things I know I've heard as a pastor. For example it talks about the fear of losing loved ones. I think that's one that I've heard a lot in the pandemic—and to be clear, understandably so. Pastor Bender who wrote that response said it so well, "*If we truly love someone, we will never 'get over the death.'* *Instead,*" he said, "*we learn to carry the burden of grief in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection and most importantly in this life, with an ever-deepening understanding of and reliance upon Christ's love in the grief He carried for us.*" In other words, should we lose loved ones, we have strength in our Lord who knows that loss, who knows grief. The One who mourned as well, but who most of all carried the grief of our sin to the cross.

Another reference was about how people fear or grieve that should they die, they will miss out on so many things they want to see and do still in this life—the good

desire to see daughters get married or to be with grandchildren. Pastor James who responded to that reminds us that as wonderful as it is to see those things, the greatest joy we have is the promise of being with our Lord. The greatest experience we will ever know is that comfort that we'll have when He raises our very bodies from the ground and we stand before Him and He wipes away our every tear. As wonderful as the gifts of this life are, the Giver who gives them is far better, and has far better yet to give!

Finally, a section that I could really relate to in my stage of life was worry for children. If something should happen to me, what about my children? For me in particular, I worry about them remaining in the faith especially, as apart from my desire to see the Lord, I want to see them with me there in the Lord's presence forever. Pastor Woodford describes how there were two deaths in his family. In both cases the families were provided for very clearly in God's providential love. As I read that, I was reminded that in my own case, I lost my mom when I was 15. Rather than this driving me away from the faith, that's at foundation of why I stand before you preaching this Gospel today.

What does all of this tell us then? It tells us that as we face death, we need not fear. We need not fear because we have that One who has taken death upon Himself. In fact, you belong to that One who has taken death upon Himself, who has not only taken death but sin, your sin, your death upon Himself, and who already has promised you life in His resurrection. Again, baptized into that, you have no need to fear, because you have been buried already and you have life again in His life. And that goodness and that care is the same love that He has not only for you, but for the whole world. That is the love that motivated His coming to rescues us from this realm of death. And He has proven it by overcoming death, not only as we heard in the story, by the power of His Word, but by the power of His life. In view of that, even though it's not Easter, we're going to conclude today as though it were—because every Sunday is actually a little Easter in the Divine Service—Alleluia, Christ is Risen!!

He is risen indeed, Alleluia. Amen!