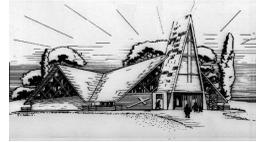




Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon – Second Sunday after Trinity (Proper 5C)

Jesus comes and stands in the way of  
death and hopelessness!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 7, 11-17:

• <sup>ESV</sup> **11** Soon afterwards He (Jesus) went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a great crowd went with Him.

• **12** As He drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of His mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

• **13** And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

• **14** Then He came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

• **15** And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

• **16** Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

• **17** And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

• Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts, visit us, create and renew Your right Spirit in us. Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation of the Holy Trinity!**

• Welcome on the road with Jesus! Today we leave Capernaum behind us, the place where Jesus healed the centurion's servant. "Speak one word", he had asked of Jesus, "and my servant will be healed". Jesus was very impressed with the faith of this gentile officer. He heard the request of this centurion.

• Today we enter a town called Nain with Jesus. And there was a big crowd accompanying them. And as they entered the gates a huge funeral procession was under-way to the graveyard. Many people gathered to do one thing: to mourn the tragic death of the only son of a widow. We have to understand one thing here: Widows had a particularly poor and difficult social standing in ancient communities. This widow at least had a son, but now, how tragic, he was dead as well. Many people came to sympathise with the widow. Not much else one can do if you are a fallible human being. This has not changed a bit!

• This earth is a valley of tears. If you really think about it, the whole earth is in mourning. Our communities are trauma struck. Death is the great common denominator amongst all

people on earth. It knows no age restriction. Young and old die. Everywhere are graves and timbstones. You can even see them as you drive next to the road. There is a great multitude of people in mourning. There are so many tragic stories. A lot of weeping going on all around us. This common experience ties in with what the Bible calls the existence of the old Adam under death, because of sin [Eph 2,1].

- A person who has no hope ends up in despair. To cope with this hopelessness many people fall into fatalism. That sounds like this: 'Well if I am going to end up in a heap of ashes, let me get out of this life as much as possible!' That is when the "its all about me" attitude even starts to make sense. So, this highly selfish attitude might after all be a coping mechanism of total hopelessness. In reality this attitude is a cry for hope, a desperate attempt to get some reason to carry on living. Lets only look at the positives and suppress the negatives! So, in the end we sit with people who deceive themselves into believing that they live, but in reality they are busy passing away.

- And with funerals this breaks through. Then we get exposed, if it is an honest funeral and not some "celebration of life" thing, which again would try and hide the facts of death.

- In this dreadful world of genuine sorrows Jesus enters. He enters Nain. He enters the funeral. What does He do? First of all it says, that "*when the Lord saw her*". The Lord Jesus is not indifferent to the mourning going on on earth! He sees you, in your mourning, when you are saddened, when you sigh in your affliction. Nobody else might notice, but the Lord sees you! This is extremely comforting to know. Jesus does not turn away from you as you experience the cross of this life!

- To the contrary: Compassion came over Him. The centre of His person, His deepest inner being, His whole heart went out to her. When you mourn or suffer, you may know this, there is One, the Holy One of God, whose whole being and existence goes out to you! He sees you, He notices you. Yes, dear congregation even to those who are not yet disciples of Him! This widow was not a disciple of Jesus, not yet. She didn't ask Jesus for help. You see, this is a bit different to the previous healing where the centurion asked Jesus.

- This widow weeps, is very sad, didn't know of Jesus. But, Jesus steps in. He sees her weeping. Dear fellow believers in Christ, what a wonderful inoffensive message we have to give to those who don't know Jesus when they experience their darkest afflictions! There is someone who sees you, who notices you in your mourning. There is someone whose whole being reaches out to you under the worst case scenarios of your existence here on earth..

- And think for one moment, how many opportunities this opens up for us if the whole world is in mourning, to tell them, 'listen, there is someone who cares, who sees you in your mourning. His heart goes out to you!'

- Jesus doesn't stop there. He does something to this widow which actually goes against all counselling rules. He commands the widow [13]: *"Do not weep!"* It is almost as if having compassion and saying these words don't go together. How can anyone command a widow to stop weeping, when she has just lost her only son? Isn't that showing harshness rather than compassion? Not when you are the authorised Son of God. Jesus' counselling is based on a different foundation than counselling which excludes the existence of God.
- Jesus came up and touched the bier, the hearse, the carriage which carried the corpse. And the bearers carrying the dead son to the grave stood still. The procession of death was halted right there. Jesus came and stood in the way of death and sadness and weeping and total hopelessness. Jesus touched death and death was stopped dead in its tracks.
- The voice of the Lord is heard [14]: *"Young man, I say to you, arise!"* **Jesus commanded death to release him!** The dead man sat up and began to speak. Indeed, he was alive! Fear seized them all and the report about Jesus spread throughout the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country: *"God has visited His people!"* This had to be God. Who else can do this?
- And then, does this story carry on like this, 'Jesus went from town to town, stopping all funeral processions' ...? Is that what He did and came to do? We know that did not happen. To be sure, Jesus did many more signs and wonders on His way to the Cross!
- These were all signs, real mighty good works, but still signs affirming the fulfilment of the Holy Scriptures, what we call the OT, God's Word. When one reads on a bit, this is what clearly stands out [7,22]: *"And He answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.'"*
- The Holy Scriptures were fulfilled by Jesus. He cured various kind of diseases and even raised a few people from the dead. These works spell it out to us: In Jesus God has indeed visited His people with His Grace! Two witnesses are enough to verify who Jesus really is. Once that is established His Word must be trustworthy.
- Jesus prepares us for the Last Day, the global day of the Resurrection from the dead. He will be the judge, but first and foremost He came to seek and preach good news to *the poor*. The poor are those who lack something. He has compassion with us. He came to wipe off our tears. He visits us today through His Word telling us not to mourn like someone who is hopeless. There is lot's and lot's of hope. We have His signs documented for us in a library of 66 books. It is written. There is a massive and formidable mountain of evidence collected over a period of thousands of years. This is not some shallow comfort we have in Christ.

- Jesus came to conquer death. He is not on the side of death. He has conquered death. Yes, He has taken the terrible sting out of every funeral, for those who trust in His Word. Death has not the final say! You will see your loved ones again. Therefore we can and we do sing hymns of resurrection as we carry the dead to their graves!
- And so the funeral service gets a new direction and emphasis, a new character! It points forward towards the global resurrection from the dead. Then there will be no weeping any more! Then every trace of death will be gone, forever removed from us.
- Jesus counsel's differently. He wakes up the dead and gives them real LIFE and death is just a sleepover. Death does not separate us from God and all true believers in Christ any more! We can say it like this: Not that we give our life to Him. No. We give our existence under death to Him and He gives us LIFE eternal, because of His sacrificial Death!
- This fact of our certain future gives our life here and now a new outlook and purpose. What is the reason that we are still here? We are here to extend the compassion and mercy of Jesus, as we receive it, to all people around us. As members of Christ's Body we are here to proclaim the good news to the poor, each and everyone in the vocation we have received from God, in word and deed. This earth is still a valley of tears. But, the Lord visits us today. He has spoken to us. We have received something vital, in the full sense of the word, to share with those who still try to deceive themselves!
- Therefore go, and stand in the way of hopelessness, by telling this very good news to the poor souls who try to see this death as life, who only know mourning and fighting with despair. The Lord Jesus Christ is with you. **Amen.**
- *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. **Amen.** (ESV Eph 3,20-21)*