

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
24 September, Anno Domini 2023
St. Luke 7:11-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Beloved in the Lord,

“Do not weep.” If you’re child died and someone said that to you, you would most likely think them to be the most thoughtless person on the planet. “My child is dead! What can I do but weep? What do you want from me? Do you think I should be happy or unaffected?” And children in graves isn’t the only reason for deep sadness in this life. Life is filled with sorrow and pain. Everyone. Everywhere you look. The line at the funeral home is like the line at McDonalds - a steady stream. And if we aren’t enduring a death right now, we are worried about one that is looming on the horizon - maybe even our own. And we weep. We weep because of our loss. We weep because it hurts. We weep because we remember our own sins and we are afraid. For many, maybe for you, the endless rolling tide of struggle and heartache and disappointment even feels like death by a thousand paper cuts. Consider the widow at Zarephath. She had already lost at least her husband and not long before the actual death of her son, they were starving and preparing to die. Was this all some cruel trick? Had God saved them only to torment them? What parent wouldn’t gladly take the place of a sick and dying child? What parent isn’t filled with the deepest dread at the thought of losing a child, however old that child may be?

“Do not weep.” Jesus isn’t being callous. He had compassion on the woman and not only her pain but also her dire situation without a husband or son. He’s not uncomfortable with crying or shows of emotion. After all, He Himself wept when His dear friend Lazarus died. Nor is Jesus struggling for something to say. Jesus knew exactly what to say. It was exactly what was needed. He wasn’t chiding the woman for her sadness as though she should just get over it. The problem was that the woman’s

sadness was running unchecked. Nain was a town in Israel. This woman, her son, the mourners and pall bearers were presumably Jews, Jews who should have known the Scriptures and therefore God's promise to swallow up death and remove it from us. This mother was mourning as those who mourn without hope. It was a mourning not simply of sadness but of utter despair. We who know the promises of God are not to mourn in that way because we know that Jesus has overcome death and that those who fall asleep in Christ are not dead but are with the Lord very much alive. Like Jesus, we may mourn and we may weep. Indeed, it could be argued that if you do not weep and mourn over sin and this wretched thing called death that it has brought about, then you don't have a good grasp of its terribleness. But our mourning is to be a mourning and weeping rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus. On that day in Nain, Jesus was drawing this distraught mother and those who shared in her sorrow back to the promises of God which He Himself had come to fulfill. In Jesus, death itself was being destroyed and EVERY tear would be wiped away because "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Jesus' exhortation to the woman was rooted in the fact that His own procession of death lay ahead of Him. Jesus had come precisely for this reason - to empty death of its sting and to wipe away the tears of sorrow that accompany death. Jesus had come to empty coffins and give eternal life.

Whether you're still reeling from closing a loved one's casket or terrified at the prospect of your own, know this - the true God is the God of life. He didn't make us to die. He made us to live - forever. He made us to live by and in His Word. The first blessing given to both man and beast was that both should not only live but multiply - to create more life, more living things.

We brought death upon ourselves. We cut the cord of life when we rejected God's Word. We chose the coffin over paradise. Adam and Eve chose the walk to the grave over walking the garden with God. And we are surrounded by reminders of that choice everywhere we turn. Mental

illness, children who live in this world only short days or years, car accidents, arguments and hurt feelings, corrupt legal systems, false and even violent religions, violent weather, famine, suicide, disease, abortion, divorce, apathy toward the Word of God, disinterest in prayer, the desires of your flesh that contradict God's Word, your failure to deny them and willingness to excuse them. The list is endless. The whole universe groans under the corruption of death. Nothing is free of its touch.

And it doesn't do anyone any good to gloss over it or call it something else, hoping to make it hurt less. Death is of the devil. Death and all of the afflictions that lead up to it, are the wages of sin, what we have earned for our disobedience and the delusion that we can live without God, without His Word. That is hell. That is the eternal judgment - a life apart from any of God's care and presence. And perhaps you have been granted a taste of this death. Perhaps your conscience has been plagued by the terror of having been separated from God, from having lived a life contrary to the Word of God. Perhaps God has allowed you taste some of the temporary fruits of such a life as the father did the prodigal son. You know what you have done and what you deserve because of it. Perhaps you have endured long nights of hopeless despair because of your guilt, knowing that God would be completely justified in turning His face away from you forever. There are no more excuses to hide behind. Just the raw truth that you are a sinner who deserves nothing short of death. The casket belongs to you.

Blessed are you. You have been given a foretaste so that you might be saved. The God of life does not desire to see you or any other sinner dead. Jesus has come for you, to stop your death march and to place you into the procession of life back into the holy city, the New Jerusalem. He has come to give you hope and to wipe away death's tears. He has stepped into the dark night of your despair and anxiousness and cast away death's shadow with the unconquerable light of His resurrection so that death itself has no actual power over you. That is not some empty platitude. Jesus wants you to look beyond the grave to see the life He gives. From Nain Jesus continued His journey to Jerusalem. There He was judged guilty of your sin. There He was condemned to your death.

He was cast out of the City of God's presence, the City of Peace, as Adam and Eve once were and all of us with them. There on Golgotha your sin, all of it, was put to death in the flesh of God's only-begotten Son. There God, the Father Almighty, turned away His face from Jesus, and gave Him over to death.

That was your death. That was your judgment. That was your funeral procession. Jesus has stopped it. Death is an empty powerless form because the dead Jesus is now the living Jesus. He Himself has left the tomb, the firstborn of many. Death was left behind forever. Jesus has filled Baptism with His life, eternal life. On the day of your Baptism, Jesus said to you, "Young man, young woman, I say to you arise! Be filled with life. Your sins are forgiven. Your coffin is but a sweet bed from which you too will rise, restored when the eternal morning dawns." Of course, this is not by your own doing. You can't overcome death any more than either of the widows' sons did. You don't choose to be resurrected. You don't work hard and overcome death. You can't. Jesus does. Jesus did.

Do not weep. You are baptized. You are not dead because Jesus is not dead. Jesus is eternally alive and your life is safely hidden in Him where neither sin nor death nor devil can take it away. By the Word of Absolution Christ opens your casket and calls you forth out of death into life. He has breathed the new life of the Holy Spirit into you that you may again live in His life through His Word. Nothing else can destroy death but His Word. Nothing else but the proclamation of the forgiveness of all your sins can raise you out of the terror of death. And here, dearly beloved of God, spread before you this day is the feast of Christ's victory. In the Holy Communion we consume under the bread and wine the Word of God's mercy made flesh, the resurrected Jesus who sits victorious at the right hand of God, having trampled your death under his feet. Here Jesus invites you to eat and drink His promises "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Here we are consumed by the very life of God. Here tears are wiped away. Here death gives way to life. Here our mouths taste what our ears have heard. Here we are given no mere empty symbol of life but life itself.

Do not weep. Do not mourn as those who have no hope. Jesus is your hope. He is your assurance that life has claimed the victory over death. All that now causes you sorrow and pain and fear have been conquered and what we now only know by faith, we will one day see with our eyes. Our Savior will return in all His resurrected glory and whatever tears have been shed will be forgotten, our joy will be complete. We, the baptized, will join together with all the saints in the eternal procession of life and joy into the eternal peace of God's gracious presence. There, together, we will gather around the Lamb of God, and we will never know anything more of death.

And what joy that we don't have to wait for that day! This day and every Lord's Day He comes. He speaks His Word of life and victory and resurrection and sends death fleeing before Him. He comes and gives hope, wipes away tears, and heals broken hearts. He has come this day for you, to forgive you and to raise you from sin's death. He comes to lift your heart and conscience out of the grave and invite you to join in procession to His altar where with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify His glorious Name, now and forever.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(Please stand) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.