

June 6, 2010
Luke 7:11-17

Pentecost 2
Matthew 9:18-26

Touched by the Master's Hand

Jesus is travelling throughout Galilee and he comes to a little village called Nain.

He has been teaching and healing and preaching and he is followed not only by his disciples, but by a big crowd of people.

He has preached about taking the planks out of their own eyes before they try to take splinters out of other peoples' eyes.

He has broken the laws against working on the Sabbath, teaching the people that the needs of the hungry come first.

He has asked the crowd, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, but don't do what I say?" He wants to take them to a stronger

faith, so that they will not be blown away by a storm of temptations or earthly struggles.

He has achieved some level of fame, but there is more that he needs to do.

Just before he arrived in Nain, a Roman centurion asked him to heal one of his servants who was near death.

Jesus did not even have to go to the servant. He spoke, and the servant, who was some other place, was healed. The crowd did not witness this miracle with their own eyes, but the word came back that the servant was well again.

But there needed to be more, more to convince the curious, more to make their faith more solid, more real.

As Jesus came into Nain, he saw a funeral procession. He saw the lifeless body of a young man and he saw the young man's mother, alone, no other sons and no husband. The funeral procession was large, probably just about everyone in town, so you have on the road one crowd following Jesus toward the town meeting another crowd, the funeral procession, coming out from Nain.

I'm NOT saying that Jesus did this for a show. Scripture clearly tells us that Jesus had compassion for the widow, who without a son to support her would live in poverty, hand to mouth, for the rest of her days.

I am saying that the timing of this meeting of the crowds was a God-given opportunity for Jesus to strengthen the faith of everyone who was there. It was a time when he could provide proof to the crowds that he was not just another rabbi, but someone sent by God.

And so he performed a miracle---he raised the dead man back to life. And the people were convinced that God was active in their midst, that God had sent a great prophet to help them.

For a minute or two, I want you to imagine that you are there, in one of those two crowds meeting each other just outside the gates of the little town of Nain.

One crowd is heading toward the town. The other is heading out, toward the cemetery.

One crowd is excited, curious, trying to learn more about Jesus and wanting to see what amazing thing he will do next!

The other crowd is in mourning, crying, wailing, in a state of shock over the early death of this young man who is the sole support of his mother.

Which crowd are you in? Did you come here this morning curious and excited, wanting to learn more about Jesus? Heading in to the town to find food and drink?

Or are you grieving today, looking for answers to your cares and concerns? Heading out of your place of comfort to a place where no one really wants to go, a place of death and silence?

Jesus is in the middle, between the two crowds. As the body is carried past him, he says to the mother, "Don't cry." Then he approaches the body. He reaches out and touches the bier, the platform that the body is carried on. The pallbearers stop.

Jesus says a few more words, directing them to the dead man.

"Young man, get up."

Imagine that you are close enough to hear those words!

Imagine being there! What else do you hear?

Is it quiet enough to hear birds singing? Are there murmurs from the crowds? Do you hear crying? Shouting? Skeptical comments?

What do you hear?

Does it get quiet enough to hear the young man draw a breath?

What do you see?

Do you see the man move his hands, his head, and then push himself up into a sitting position? Do you see the mother's face fill with amazement, relief, joy? Do you see the people in the front of the crowds pause, transfixed with surprise, and then turn to the people behind them, telling them what just happened?

Do you feel the people behind you pushing forward, trying to see better? Do you feel their breath on the back of your neck as they get as close as they can?

What are your emotions? Amazement? Joy? Disbelief? Shock?

Are you jumping with excitement or shaking your head in wonder?

What do you want to say to Jesus? What do you want to ask him?

Soon you are hearing the crowd! Praise God! God has sent us a great prophet to be among us! God is with us, here, working miracles through this man named Jesus!

And your voice joins in----praise God! Praise God! Hallelujah!

Thanks be to God for the gift of this great prophet!

Can you picture it? Are you there? In the crowd?

Now shift the scene----

Imagine that you are that young man, dead, on your way to your grave---

You can hear crying and wailing. Most of all you can hear your mother, who depends on you, and there is nothing you can do about it---you are dead. You can't speak. You can't move. You can't even breathe. How did this happen? You are too young to die! And what will happen to your mother without you?

And as the noises of the world around you fade away into silence, you hear a voice, filled with both compassion and power. What is the voice saying? What?

It's saying "Young man, get up!" Get up?? But you're dead!

How can you get up?

But you try to get up, and you find that you can. In only a moment you are sitting up, talking.

You look around and see who spoke to you. You don't know who he is, but he takes your hand and turns you to look at your mother. You get up and embrace her.

What do you hear now?

Do you hear the words of your mother? What is she saying? What are the people around you saying? They are saying that there is a great prophet among us and praising God!

What are you seeing?

A huge crowd around you. You know many of the people, because everyone in the little town of Nain knows each other, but some of the people are from out of town. You look for Jesus. Do you see him? What is he doing? Is he swallowed up by the crowd, or is he still standing close by, watching you and your mother? Is he saying anything to anyone? What?

What do you feel? Do you feel your mother's embrace? Do you feel other hands on you? Other hugs, other touches?

Do you still feel weak, or are you strong, completely restored, immediately? Are you hungry or not even thinking about food?

What will you do with this second chance at life? Will you make any big changes?

What will you do now that you have felt the touch of the Master's hand, giving you back to your mother?

Will you follow Jesus? Will you become a leader of people or resume a quieter life? Will you go on just as though you had never died and been brought back to life? Or will everything be different

And when Jesus spoke to that young man and restored his life,
you can also be sure that it changed everything for the people in
the crowds who came to believe that Jesus had been sent by God
to help them, to save them.

And beyond that, the touch of the Master's hand, and his words,
and his presence among us has changed so much for so many
people!

Even for us---

Like that young man, some of us need to be restored to life.

We might be dead because we are failing to use all of our gifts and graces. We might be burying all of our talents and skills in the ground. We might be far, far from living up to our God-given potential. We might not be taking care of each other the way that we could.

We might be dead to faith, not being able to see God in others or in the world around us.

We might be depressed, with all joy and love dead in our lives.

We might be addicted to substances or behaviors, trapped without the freedom to breathe the pure air of God's love.

We might not be able to feel on our necks the breath of God which is the power of the Holy Spirit. We might be dead in our sins, struggling against pride, envy, selfishness, greed, and bitterness.

There are so many ways that we might be dead and not experiencing the full love and power of Jesus Christ! Imagine again being carried out to the cemetery when you hear a voice telling you to get up!

Jesus is telling us all to get up! Get up from whatever low place we are in, get up from the place where we can no longer be of any use to anyone, get up from being dead to the love of God! GET UP!!

Some of us have a hard time hearing the voice of Christ.

Sometimes our ears need a physical voice to listen to, calling us to live the abundant life that Christ wants us to have.

And that is one way that we can be the body of Christ! We have our physical voices to speak to each other!

When we see someone else flattened by the cares of this world, by the struggles they are having, by the lies they are believing, or by the losses they feel, we can gently say

Get up!

Get up!

Take my hand and I will help you---Get up!

We can say, God cares about you. Jesus is here to help you.

Listen to the words of Jesus telling you to get up. Feel that he is touching you, helping you, and get up!

How can we say this to other people?

It's not that hard. Let the Holy Spirit guide you and give you the words that someone who is suffering needs to hear. Let the Spirit guide your words and your touch.

Let yourself feel compassion and then act on that compassion.

Speak the words that the Spirit puts into your mouth. Let your touch be the touch of the Master's hand.

Don't hold back either your words or your touch.

Jesus Christ, sent by God to help the people, is alive in you.

Share that life with others by word and touch----by action and encouragement.

Share the touch of the Master's hand in the way that you live your life, in the grace, mercy and compassion you extend to others.

Get up and follow in the footsteps of the one who is the Master of
all, and you will live!

Amen!