

Text: Luke 7:11-17 (Pentecost 3, Series C, June 30, 2019)

Theme: Jesus being Jesus

Virtue (basic truth): With one, compassionate miracle, Jesus displays the Savior we have!

Malady (our problem): Sin so frequently/foolishly fails to see Jesus and what he is doing.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of Grace opens our hearts to the oh-so-gracious aspects of our dear Jesus on bright display in his interaction with a widow.

Propositional Statement (aim): We're not afraid to vent the challenge with disapproval: *what's he doing?!* Even at Jesus we lob the demand. But, instead of biting back, he allows us to stare in wonder at his activity and, at the same time, answers: he's Jesus being Jesus!

Specific Law in Text: implied in our initial disapproval of the situation

Specific Gospel in Text: "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry'" (Luke 7:13).

Doctrinal Thought: Jesus is proof that God visits us with care and compassion.

Sanctification Thought: *"Lord Jesus, lost in myself, I quickly forget your heart of compassion and dismiss your perfect timing in all things – and in my life. But you, Breath of Life, are patient to remind me of your love, quick to remind me you are still here, you do still speak, you do still act. Forgiver and Friend, again refresh my heart in you; bless me with a faith to know, in all things, you are the Savior being the Savior – Jesus being Jesus – for me! As you delight my heart to know it, open my lips to make it known. Amen!"*

Luke 7:11-17

Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Luke orderly accounts “so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4) and that always brings us back to the Savior we have and know. Alleluia and Amen!

It’s normally an irritated interrogative. And, most often, we’re just enough removed from it to observe it with limited detail, and to opine with unlimited disgust. Sometimes, it’s experience; most usually, it’s perception. A disgruntled driver. A not-so-sharp paid-athlete. A tough-spirited toddler. Different setting and subject; same strange question: *what are you doing?!*

Whether they answer or not, clearly their choice is irrational, their actions are destructive, and their activity is something we’d never do – certainly never endorse. The best we can do in that strange balance of wonderment and entitlement is pry their purpose and demand their reason.

But it’s not always vented at a disgruntled driver. At times, wonderment and entitlement collide to vent at the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That’s not what came to heart in *Confession of Sins*; but the strangery of life sings *What God Ordains Is Always Good*, all while thinking “*I’m not so sure he really knows;*” hearts swell an *Alleluia!* – with a sighs of “*How?!*” and “*Huh?!*”

Wrestle with that for the next few minutes. What in your life questions what God is really doing? And, as I walk us through the lesson from Luke 7 (:11-17), Spirit of Grace help us turn that irritated interrogative a thousand ways to marvel at what ***Jesus being Jesus*** means for us.

Let’s start with this: the Old Testament reading from I Kings (17:17-24) happened in history about 50 miles away and 900 years before; but commonality neighbors the narratives. A widow. Her only son. One life-flame extinguished. One life-flame close to being snuffed out. A “*man of God*” not from around there; but who happens to be there. *Nain* means “*Vale of Beauty;*” but it’s all misery at the city gate – and they’re tears the Eternal One had seen before. This poor woman certainly didn’t ask for this; neither had Zarephath’s widow. But the death was died and the tears were real, the funeral procession was en route, and we ask: *what is Jesus doing here?!*

And, maybe the reason we want that answer so badly, is because we have those times in our lives, too. Your heart knows those specifics; your eyes know what brought the tears you cried. Maybe not to widow-proportions, but, in all of our lives, we deal with situations for which we didn’t ask, and in which we raise the irritated interrogative: *what are you doing here, Jesus?!*

We’ll get back into the text in just a minute, but there’s a gospel gem too gracious to neglect. We can stare at the misery outside Nain; and we can wonder at the muddlement of our own lives. But please don’t neglect or overlook or forget about the reality that Jesus is actually . . . there. In fact, smile at it. He doesn’t circumvent hardship; he confronts it. Difficulty is present; so is he. Because ***Jesus being Jesus*** means he’s there, he’s present, just as he promised!

Two narratives become interwoven at Nain's gate. One account is adoration – the Centurion's servant is healed! The other, is anguish – her son was dead. But, even as two narratives collide, Luke gives a subtle hint something is about to change. Listen again, "*When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'*" (Luke 7:13). *Jesus* is fitting. *Rabbi* is fitting. *Son of God* is fitting. But, here, Luke calls him, *Lord!* – same title the Centurion called our Jesus. Then, the title aroused authority over sickness; but here, it's not prompted by power; nor is it connected to the faith of the grieving. Instead, the title of authority, the *Lord* . . . the God who ordains all things . . . is connected to . . . how he really feels. His heart. His compassion. Not only is the *Lord* there; the *Lord* is there with his heart.

Very simply: friends, whatever's going on in your life, the Lord is here, too. With his heart. He's not at an indifferent distance. He's not preoccupied with someone or something more important. He's there for the widow. With his heart. He's there for you. With the very same.

And his heart moved him to speak. From anyone else, the sympathy is pathetic. "*Don't cry*" (Luke 7:13). What is he doing; who says *that* to a grieving mom!? Our advice is crisp: Jesus, either move on or do something; either act or get out the way. But, instead of awkward silence, the Lord speaks! "*[Don't cry] was spoken sympathetically, a gracious announcement to the woman to dry her tears, spoken by him who was about to remove their cause*" (Wendland, 230). Who is this that is present at such a time as this, and who speaks in such a way as this?!

I don't know why it's so hard for us to remember. *Jesus being Jesus* means he's present, he's compassionate, and he's communicative – he speaks before he acts. Should be easy; should be obvious. It's as if he calls the play, and then does it. Of course that makes sense!

What's Jesus doing!? What he always does! In compassion, *Jesus being Jesus* communicates; he speaks – before we suspect questions; he declares – before we demand answers; he always utters – even before we can lodge a complaint. He speaks; let's make sure we're listening when he does. He speaks; let's make sure our lives are tuned to where he does. And, above all, let's never rush to his activity and forget the heart of compassion by which he speaks . . . first.

And now the miracle; now the activity.

God's one and only Son turns his attention to the widow's one and only son. Not a wave of a hand, not even a prayer, and all sighs aside, with a word, the Breath of Life breathes life into the once truly dead (7:15). God's Son – fully compassionate. Her son – fully restored. *Jesus being Jesus* acts in a way no other can – simply with his life-giving, life-restoring Word!

Friends, that's a miracle he's done millions of times over as he still speaks into lifeless hearts to create life; as he speaks to sinners dead in sin to bring us to breathe the joy of his forgiveness. ***Jesus being Jesus*** speaks and then acts. You are forgiven. It is finished. He is risen!

What in the world is Jesus doing outside Nain?! Answer is simple then and still beautiful now: he's being Jesus. ***Jesus being Jesus*** always displays the Savior we need to see, the Savior we get to see. He's being Jesus – observant to situation and need. He's being Jesus – whose heart pulses in compassion to restore. He's being Jesus – who dares to speak words of power and love that can never fail. He's being Jesus – present among people. He's being Jesus – operating in his perfect way and season to bring people to him. He's being Jesus – acting for the benefit of those who don't deserve it. He's ***Jesus being Jesus*** – because that's the Savior we need!

As heightened as that Savior-focus is, there's one more activity of ***Jesus being Jesus*** we need to note and we get to celebrate: “*They were all filled with awe and praised God. ‘A great prophet has appeared among us,’ they said. ‘God has come to help his people.’ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country*” (Luke 7:16, 17).

What's he doing?! Even as he receives the crowd's adoration and accolades, he's letting the world know that, faithful to his love and promise and forgiveness and compassion, “*God has come to help his people*” (Luke 7:16). ***Jesus being Jesus*** is glorified as God and Lord!

It's simply not right for me to pretend to know what happened in your life – or what's happening in your life, or what will happen in your life – that raises to heaven the irritated interrogative: *Jesus, what are you doing?!* I don't know what causes you to question the goodness of what God ordains, or to hesitate breathing a 5-fold Alleluia. And, likely that's none of my business.

But I do know what my prayer is for you; I do know what God's grace and peace is for you. It's to know in your heart and in your mind and in your day the joy and confidence of ***Jesus being Jesus*** – of the One and Only being present, being compassionate, being communicative, being active, being glorified – in the way you get to know, in a way that swells your life to Alleluia!

When the people recognized that when narratives collide, Jesus wins, they didn't keep it a secret. They couldn't. They wouldn't. Neither can we. Christians, can you think of someone who needs to know that; who needs to see that Jesus the way we do; who needs to know the height of love and depth of faith found in ***Jesus being Jesus***? Don't just point him to him; take him to him. Don't just talk to her about him; bring her here to learn about him. So that maybe next week just one more gets to smile over answer we do that in Zarephath, in Nain, in Boulder, Longmont, and – God bless it! – in eternity, we get to know and see ***Jesus being Jesus!***

Alleluia and Amen!