

Sermon for June 4, 2016

Imagine someone you love dearly has just died unexpectedly. Your faith says that the burial needs to be within twenty four hours, so the arrangements have been made for tomorrow. It's now the day of the funeral. The service is over and you're on the way to the cemetery. You barely remember getting into the car. You stare out the window not really seeing anything as you drive by; your thoughts are else where.

Then you feel the car come to a stop and you're jolted back to reality. When you look up you realize that you're not at the cemetery; in fact you're stopped by the side of the road. The funeral director and pastor are arguing with someone that you don't know. Then he does something that you can't believe you're seeing—he goes to the back of the hearse as if to open it.

Your grief is raw and this is the last straw—you can't take anymore. You get out of your car and with deep cries you tell the man to stop. He turns towards you and tells you not to weep. Not to weep, you think, just who does he think he is and just what does he think he's doing! Then you look into his eyes and you see such understanding and compassion in them that you stop in your tracks. You're unable to say anything and you barely feel the arms around you, holding you up.

The man turns away from you and enters the hearse. He opens the casket and you barely hear him telling your loved one to rise. Then you think that your ears are playing tricks on you because you hear the voice of your loved one. You must be losing it! And then you see your loved one walking out of the hearse with the stranger leading him over to you. If others hadn't been holding you up you

would have dropped to your knees out of fear, disbelief and indescribable joy. The stranger hands over your loved one and then leaves. You have no idea who he is or why he just did what he did for you.

And if I'm being honest it's at this point in this wonderful story that I get mad at God. Why? Because we've all been in the place of that widow and lost ones that we loved, but there's been no prophet to touch the bier and bring them back to life.

I think of my friend who as a young mother had her four year old son, her only child, die from leukemia. I think of my cousins who lost their oldest daughter and only son in a car accident when they were sixteen and fourteen. I think of my seminary classmate, his parents only son, who was killed in the earthquake on Haiti. I'm sure you have similar stories that you could share too.

All of these children were loved and their parents prayed for their protection and healing. They believed and trusted in God; and yet they all died. And if I take only this story of the raising of the widow's son from death; a widow who didn't ask for it and who didn't even know Jesus, I can very easily get mad at God and ask, "Why this widow's son and not the others?"

That's why I can't take this story on its own; I need to include it in the whole of Jesus' story. I need to remember that the good news of Jesus Christ isn't that the widow of Nain got her son back. The good news of Jesus Christ is that of a down to earth God who becomes truly human with us. We have a God who suffers with us and for us; a God who dies with us and for us, so that, by Christ's dying, the ultimate power of sin, death, and evil is undone. Good Friday and Easter are

good news because they answer the deepest hurts and the greatest fears that we have.

I need to put this story with the rest to remind me that Jesus still raises the dead. We trust that promise each time we go to the cemetery and say those words: "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother or sister, and we commit his or her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Jesus still raises the dead. We trust that promise each time we bring another person to the waters of Holy Baptism and say those words: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

Jesus still raises the dead. We trust that promise each time we bring our shattered lives, our broken hearts, our anger, our depression, and our deepest hurts to the Lord's table and hear His sure and certain words; "This is my body and this is my blood given and shed for you!"

And so we pray, even when it is hard to do: "Almighty God, your love never fails, and you can turn the shadow of death into daybreak. Help us to receive your word with believing hearts, so that, confident in your promises, we may have hope and be lifted out of sorrow into the joy and peace of your presence; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen."