

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity | St. Luke 7:11-17  
September 20, 215 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Lord God, heavenly Father, You sent Your Son to be made flesh, that by His death He might atone for our sins and deliver us from eternal death: We pray, confirm in our hearts the hope that our Lord Jesus Christ, who with but a word raised the widow's son, in like manner will raise us on the last day and grant us eternal life; through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*ELH*, p. 162)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Soon afterward [Jesus] went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a great crowd went with Him. 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. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." / Then He came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. / Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited His people!" And this report about Him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who was Life in the beginning, is Life now, and shall be Life forevermore, dear fellow redeemed:

It is very common for something to have a value greater than the material it is made of. For example, the dime costs about 4 cents to make, but it is worth 10 cents. The quarter worth 25 cents costs only 9 cents to produce. The rare and coveted Honus Wagner baseball card is nothing more than the image of a man on a hundred-year-old piece of cardboard. But despite its make-up, one of these cards recently sold at auction for almost 3 million dollars. This is the case for many antiques and artifacts, that they are valued not as much for their basic materials as for what those materials have been shaped into.

What value is to be assigned to human life? Is it to be measured by the parts that make it up, with the greatest value given to the most essential parts like the heart and the brain? Is it measured by the uniqueness of a person or what that individual is capable of contributing to society? The question of the value of a life has been contemplated by every culture in history. The answer that is usually given is that certain people are more valuable than others. This has led to all sorts of evil in our world, including oppression, discrimination, slavery, genocide, and war.

God answers the question of the value of a life in a much different way, and He answers it with action more than He does with words. We will consider today what His answer means both for you and for the world in which you live.

## I

One way to gauge how a society values life is to see how it treats the dead. Are the so-called “remains” treated with reverence and honor or cast aside as something not to be bothered about anymore? In today’s Gospel text, we find a culture that respected the dead. A young man was carried from the town of Nain in a coffin, accompanied by his weeping mother and a sizeable portion of the town. It must have seemed to the mourners there, and certainly to the mother, that death had come unfairly. Already she had lost her husband, and now her only son also lay dead.

But death has no favorites and shows no distinctions. It comes upon rich and poor, old and young, believer and unbeliever. It comes just as steadily today as it came thousands of years ago, cutting down even the strongest among us. God is not responsible for this horror. It comes because of man, because Adam and Eve chose to disobey the command of God and ate fruit from the forbidden tree. As the LORD told Adam, *“in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gen. 2:17).

Nothing could be more opposite God than death, because God is life. In the beginning, God created; He brought forth life. The Bible says that this life originated through the Word of God’s Son. St. John writes, *“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”* (Jn. 1:3-4).

So here outside this little town of Nain, a procession of grief mourning a body’s death, met up with the Life-giver Himself, God in the flesh. Which of the two would emerge the victor, the One who forms countless lives, or the one who lays them in the grave? Jesus stepped up to the dead man and said, *“Young man, I say to you, arise.”* Immediately the man sat up and began talking just as if he had awoken from sleep. Death’s cold grip had to release this man at the word of Jesus. Jesus would not have had to speak to resurrect this man, but He typically operates by the power of His Word. God created the world with His Word, and this is how He creates faith also, with His Word.

But it wasn’t enough for Jesus to bring one man back from the dead for death to cease its destructive activity. This was something like taking down one terrorist while a whole network of terrorists with its leader continues its evil work. Jesus came to storm the stronghold of death in the only way it could be overwhelmed. The Lord of Life entered into death to win victory over it once for all. Death could ignore the resurrection of a man in the tiny town of Nain. Sin remained unpaid for, and *“the wages of sin is death”* (Rom. 6:23). But death could not ignore the resurrection of the Son of God, the Life-giver Himself, who made satisfaction for sin. Martin Luther wrote about this in his great Easter hymn:

It was a strange and dreadful strife  
When life and death contended.  
The victory remained with life,

The reign of death was ended;  
Holy Scripture plainly saith  
That death is swallowed up by death,  
In vain it rages o'er us. Alleluia! (ELH #343, v. 4)

When Jesus rose from the dead, He rose in victory for all. The author of Hebrews writes that He "*taste[d] death for everyone*" (2:9). Just as death makes no distinctions in its terrible work, so Jesus makes no distinctions in His gracious work. He died and rose again for the salvation of all people.

## II

This should give you an idea what the value of life is from God's perspective. God does not judge our value based on anything we have done for Him or against Him. He does not judge our value based on where we came from, who we know, or how successful we are. He does not judge our value based on our faithfulness, intelligence, beauty, generosity, or anything else. He loves every sinner the same. The Son of God took on flesh to save all sinners. He lived a perfect life on behalf of every sinner. He died on the cross for each sinner. He rose from the dead in victory over the death that all sinners deserve. Every human life is as precious to our heavenly Father as His only-begotten Son is precious to Him.

This is not the value our world assigns to life. The world accommodates death. It even worships death as the solution for society's problems. What do we do about the problem of unplanned pregnancies? The world says that we eliminate the life in the womb (and maybe even make some money off body parts in the process). What do we do about poverty? We sterilize poor women so that life cannot be produced, and so that certain sub-sets of our culture might eventually be extinguished. What do we do about the strain on our healthcare system? We promote assisted suicide to faster rid ourselves of the elderly and the terminally ill.

These evils are great. The people of the world place a high value on the strong, the rich, and the powerful and devalue the weak, the handicapped, and the troubled. They hardly stop to think what will happen to them when they become sick, or poor, or aged. They have bought into the reasoning of the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), the devil, who is the great ally of death.

Christians live in the world and witness these horrors, but they must never grow comfortable with them. Christians defend life at every stage, from the fertilized egg until the final raspy breath, because that is what God does. He is a God of life, and so we are a people of life. God does not leave us wondering how much He values our lives. Jesus said, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows*" (Mt. 10:29-31). Even the entire wealth of the world is not more valuable in God's sight than a single human soul (Mt. 16:26).

Such a value placed on us by God is beyond our comprehension. In our sin, we are a lot like the metals used to make the dime and quarter; we are worth far less by nature than we are valued by God. In fact, we are worth nothing at all on our own and have earned death by our sin (Rom. 6:23). It is absolutely what we deserve. But because Jesus took on the punishment for our sin and died our death, God now regards us as holy and righteous. He has compassion on us and

says, "Do not weep for your sins. Do not fear death. Sin is forgiven! Life has been won! It is all yours through faith in My Son." So whenever you feel less than valuable or wonder if your life matters to God or anyone else, cling to God's promise. God the Father sent His Son to save you. Your life was worth the death of Christ. You are priceless in God's estimation.

If that is the way God looks at you, then you know that is how He looks at those around you. All are precious to Him, which means they should be precious to us too. We should seek opportunities to help and befriend our neighbors (even the mean ones), just as the Lord has so graciously helped us. Everyone around us needs to hear the message that God has bought back their lives from sin and death by the precious blood of Jesus.

We will struggle to understand how much God values us as long as we remain in the sinful world. Here so many "go the way of all the earth" (Jos. 23:14; 1Ki. 2:2) and return to the ground from which man was originally formed (Gen. 3:19). Our value cannot be perceived in death, but only in the One who came back out of the ground on the third day - alive and never to die again. By faith in this One, Jesus, the victory over death is already won. Even though our bodies are laid to rest in a tomb, Jesus will wake us again with His Word as easily as he woke up the man from Nain. When He awakens us, we will do more than sit up and speak. We will rise in all glory singing the praises of Him who is our Joy, our Treasure, our Crown. *Amen.*

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto everlasting life. Amen.*

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