

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

We in 21st Century America do not do death well.

Why are we afraid of death?

Why do we want to avoid going to nursing homes or hospitals when someone is near death?

Why are we relieved when we have a valid reason not to attend a funeral,
instead of saddened when we simply cannot make it.

Why are we hesitant to plan our funerals well in advance of when we think the Church might need it?

Why do we feel so uncomfortable when we try to console someone during their time of mourning?

There are many reasons, not the least of which are

fear, fear of death itself, not only our own, but that of others, and what life will be like w/o them.
or the shame we might have in not knowing what to say or what to expect,
or feelings of sadness or the fear of having final memories of someone that are less than ideal.

But I would also suspect that another reason, whether we would be able to name it or not,
is that our human reason and intellect cannot process or fathom
the miracle of life recorded for us here in Luke 7:11-17.

Because if we could, we would be a lot more hopeful around the illness or death of a Christian.

We read as follows 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. (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

One of the tragedies of the Coronavirus shutdowns was the inability of families and friends to gather together (or to gather together in larger numbers) for the funerals of their loved ones.

(I say this simply to express the sadness of the situation,

that at a time when humans need comfort and compassion and encouragement and PEOPLE,
like when we are mourning for a loved one, it was not to happen.)

At Parkland alone, since COVID came, we have had 8 funeral/memorial/committal services where attendance had to be limited.

Now in some cases, the reality of the matter is that it didn't really matter what the limit was, because only a few were going to come anyway.

The Christian, while a member, was not particularly well-known among the membership or much of the family lived far way.

But in other cases, it was very sad to hear the family discuss who was going to be able to be physically present and who would have to watch on livestream, as the deceased Christian or his or her family was well-known and loved, or the situation of the death was so sad that it evoked the desire in more people to want to gather.

St. Luke reports on a situation like that.

A young man had died – in the “prime of life,” we often say. Perhaps the family was well-regarded. We have no report of how he died, whether illness or accident, or what. Just that he died.

But the tragedy was not only in his “premature” death, but also in the fact that his mother was a widow.

The men in her life, who would have been her means of support, were now both dead.

So not only was there a loss of the loved one, but also little promise for her future life without them.

And we see the community responding in a big way.

In the little town of Nain, we hear that **a considerable crowd from the town was with her.**

They came to support her and to “be there” for and with her.

What an encouragement that must have been for her in her distress.

But someone else also came to that funeral, though it wasn’t based on any man-made schedule.

Jesus, with His disciples and a great crowd met them near the city gate.

Both crowds making lots of noise, one wailing, the other excited.

But one crowd couldn’t pass the other in the gate, one would have to give way.

Today, when we have funeral processions, you aren’t to break it up. It’s rude.

But Jesus rudely stepped into this funeral procession in order to break it up.

You can imagine the widow weeping at the death of her only son.

Like the crowd following her, Jesus Himself also had compassion on her.

Even though He had “just met her,” He cared for her, and not just for this day, but the days ahead.

However, unlike the crowd, Jesus could actually do something about her situation.

And so, unsolicited by anyone, the Lord who knows all things and can do all things, speaks to her and says, “Do not weep.”

Note that He doesn’t say this to her because weeping at a funeral is wrong or bad.

Solomon, inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote, that there is **a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.**^{Ecclesiastes 3:3-4}

St. Paul, also inspired, writes, **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers,**

about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.^{1 Thes.4:13}

Notice that he does not say that Christians should not grieve at the time of death, but we grieve with hope in the resurrection of the dead at Christ’s return.

And, of course, there is also the example of Jesus Himself, when, knowing what He would do within a few moments, **Jesus wept** on the occasion of the death of His friend Lazarus.^{John11:35}

But Jesus tells her not to weep now because He was going to give her reason for joy, not just at the resurrection of her son, but in His power over all death.

...

But before we move on to that, we should also note here that Jesus could have provided for her in the days/years ahead even without the miracle of raising her son

just as He has done for thousands of other widows who have lost their only child.
It wasn't that this was the only way to be gracious to her.

But remember that while Jesus lived on earth, and also now,

He lives so that those who lived then and now may have and grow in faith.
That faith is not just a general, abstract "pie in the sky" concept,
but is grounded firmly in His concrete ability to raise people from the dead.

Jesus, here and with Jairus' daughter and with Lazarus, shows that He has the power over death,
so that the only really surprising thing that happens at His own resurrection
is that He has power even to raise Himself from the dead.

To believe this truly is a miracle. It is a miracle of spiritual life as God's life-giving Word is spoken
into our spiritually dead ears.

It is a miracle that our fears of death, our shame and guilt, and all our sin were placed on Jesus,
and that His faith in the Father's promises, His perfect and righteous life are given to us in Words.
It is a miracle as great and impossible as this resurrection story of the widow's son.

...

Returning then to the event at Nain, Jesus moves from the widow to her son.

Notice, He does not recoil from death or the things of death.

Nor is He afraid of becoming unclean by touching the bier, the casket.

Such things do not make Him unclean, but His holiness sanctifies them and makes them clean.

He goes right up to the bier and speaks His all-powerful Word into the dead, lifeless ears,

"Young man, I say to you, arise."

And as if he had just fallen asleep, as if rigor mortis hadn't set in,

as if his lungs and esophagus hadn't already begun to decompose, he sits up and begins to speak.

Jesus then gave him to his mother, whose weeping had to stop.

It has been noted that for all of the resurrections Jesus performed,

He always directs His Word to one person, "young man," "little girl," "Lazarus."

They postulate that if He did not specify to whom He was speaking, all the dead would have to rise.

Now, whether that is true or not, we will not know, but what we DO know

is that on the Last Day, when Jesus *comes to judge the living and the dead*, Apostles' Creed
when He speaks, ALL the dead will rise.

Whether they have been dead only a few moments, a few days, a few thousand years...

whether they have been buried, cremated, lost at sea, blown to smithereens, or scattered in the wind...

whether they have or have not believed in Jesus as their Savior,

they will rise from the dead to meet Him.

On that day, there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth** for those who rejected Him, Matthew8:12

who in life stopped their ears so that they would not hear His gracious, life-giving Word.

But for those who heard His Word, who received it in faith given by the Holy Spirit,

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more,

neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. Revelation21:4

Instead, there will be pure and eternal comfort and joy.

...

Our Lord still desires to support His people after the death of loved ones.

Jesus continues to show compassion to the bereaved... through His people.

We see this in acts of kindness as you support the earthly needs of those who are grieving.

It is seen in cards and notes, in flowers and memorials given, not only at the time of death, but in the remembrance of special dates.

But it is also and perhaps especially seen in the gift of your personal presence.

Of all places, the church building during a funeral of a Christian should be as filled as it is on Easter, as Christians gather:

to remember God's grace to their departed brother or sister in the faith,
(whether they knew that person well or not),

and to receive His gracious and life-giving Word themselves in their grief...for their joy.

Dear Christian, you do not need to fear death.

Death fears you because you are baptized into Christ.

You have already died to sin and death, and behold, you live.

You can go, confidently to the funeral, to the committal, to those who grieve and mourn now, and you can give them hope in Christ.

If you can't think of the right words to say at a Christian funeral or to one who is grieving, let it not be because you are at a loss for your own thing to say.

Instead, let it be because you can't decide which of our Lord's many life-giving and faith-strengthening Words and promises regarding the resurrection you would like to say specifically to the survivors.

Let it be that every Christian Church learns and knows how to do death well.

After all, it will happen to each one of us until Christ's return.

Let us weep with those who weep, as well as rejoice with them,

For Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Soli Deo Gloria