

Sermon Text (Luke 7:11–17 ESV)

¹¹ Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹² 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. ¹³ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” ¹⁴ Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶ Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” ¹⁷ And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Jesus Wipes Away Our Tears

When you’re young, the last thing on your mind is death. You expect that you’re going to live a long life and that, when you do eventually die, you will die of old age. And why wouldn’t you think that? After all, that’s just how the world naturally works. Death seems like something that is so far away that you don’t have to even start thinking about it until you’ve at least hit retirement age. However, death doesn’t just come to those who have lived a long life. It can come to anyone, no matter how old or young they are. Sometimes, it can even come when a person least expects it.

Even though death is viewed as a natural part of the world, it seems to only be viewed as natural when someone who is older dies. It doesn’t matter if that person died of old age or of a sickness. They were old, so it’s to be expected. However, when someone dies while they’re still young, even if they die from the exact same sickness as an older person does, it seems to suddenly be treated as something unnatural. They had so much life left to live, but now they’ve been robbed of that life. Death wasn’t supposed to come to them for a long time. Therefore, it only makes sense for their death to be considered unnatural. But there’s nothing natural about death in the first place.

When God created the world, there was no death, and there would have never been any death. God created a world in which everyone would live forever in paradise. However, when

Adam and Eve, our first parents, sinned by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the fruit that God commanded them not to eat, death entered the world. This is because death is the end result of sin. As the apostle Paul says, “[T]he wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The only reason why death seems natural is because sin has corrupted God’s perfect world. Death was never supposed to exist, but now, death is everywhere. And there’s no escaping it, because we’re all sinners. We all inherited the original sin of our first parents and are unable to live a life without sin. Therefore, we all deserve to die, and not just physically, but also eternally in the fires of hell.

Because we are by nature sinful and deserve death, it seems completely unnatural for God to love us at all. After all, since we are by nature sinful, that means that we are by nature enemies of God. We hated God, so why would God love us? Even though it doesn’t seem natural to us, it doesn’t change the fact that God does love us. His love for us is so great that he willingly laid down his own life to save us from the death that we rightfully deserved. As the apostle John says, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus was the one person who did not deserve to die, because he never sinned once. He lived the perfect life that none of us are able to live. And yet, he died anyway. He died by willingly laying down his own life on our behalf. He endured the eternal death that we rightfully deserved as he hung on the cross. And he did it all so that we would not have to endure it. Now, what awaits us at the end of our lives is eternal life in heaven.

Death no longer has any power over us, because, by his death, Jesus destroyed the power of death. And yet, death is still something that we will have to face, unless Jesus returns before then. This is because, while we are here on earth, we are at the same time sinner and saint. We are saints because Jesus has saved us from our sins, but our sinful nature still lives in us and continues

to lead us into temptation. As the apostle Paul says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:18–19).

Death is the tragic and painful reminder that we are still sinners. Even though we know that death has lost its power over us, we can’t help but feel sorrow when our loved ones die. That is because we realize that we are going to have to wait to be reunited with our loved ones until the day when we, too, depart from this earthly life and enter the gates of heaven. Even though we will one day be reunited with our loved ones, the pain of that temporary separation can be truly unbearable. This is true no matter how old our loved ones are when they die, but that pain can be even more unbearable when someone who is still young is taken from us. Therefore, we can understand the pain and sorrow that the widow of Nain was feeling in our text for today, who not only had lost her husband, but had also lost her only son. Thankfully for her, Jesus was there to comfort her in her time of sorrow.

When Jesus saw the widow of Nain, “he had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’” (verse 13). Now, these words would mean nothing if Jesus wasn’t able to give her a reason not to weep. And if Jesus was just a man, he would be unable to give her that reason, but Jesus wasn’t just a man. He was also true God, which he proved to the widow of Nain by what he did next. “[H]e came up and touched the bier. . . . And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ And the dead man sat up and began to speak” (verses 14–15). With this, Jesus took away any reason that the widow of Nain had to be sorrowful and proved to her that he has power over death, giving her comfort and hope for the future.

Jesus gives us the exact the same comfort that he gave to the widow of Nain. True, he may not raise our loved ones back to life at this exact moment, but he does promise that our loved ones

will rise again. This promise would mean nothing if he wasn't able to give a reason to trust that what he says is true, but he has given us a reason. And not just one, but several reasons. The first reason is the fact that he raised the widow of Nain's son. Just as this proved to the widow of Nain that he has power over death, it also proves to us that he has power over death. And it wasn't just the widow of Nain's son that he raised from the dead. He also raised Jarius' daughter (Luke 8:40–56), as well as Mary and Martha's brother, and his friend, Lazarus from the dead not long before his own death (John 11:1–41). And the final reason that Jesus gives us to trust his promise that our loved ones will rise again is that, on the third day after he died on the cross, he rose again from the dead.

Jesus also gives us comfort that we and our loved ones will rise again in the sacrament of holy baptism. In the waters of baptism, our old self was drowned, and our new self was raised up. Our baptism gives us something tangible that we can hold on to and point to whenever questions about the certainty of our salvation arises, since, as the apostle Paul says, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). As that great baptism hymn says:

“Death, you cannot end my gladness;
I am baptized into Christ!
When I die, I leave all sadness
To inherit Paradise!
Though I lie in dust and ashes
Faith's assurance brightly flashes:
Baptism has the strength divine
To make life immortal mine” (ELH 246:4).

We may have lost our paradise on earth when Adam and Eve first sinned, but because of everything that Jesus has done for us in order to save us, an even greater paradise awaits us in heaven. On that glorious day when we are called home to heaven, we will experience joy without

end. There will be no more pain; no more suffering; no more death; no more sadness. As the apostle John says, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Even though there are times when death seems far away, it could actually come at any time. The faith that you have in Jesus makes you always prepared for the possibility of death, but that doesn't necessarily make the pain of death any less painful. In those moments of pain and sorrow, Jesus is there to help you bear it. As Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30). Jesus is there to help you bear the burdens of your pain and sadness, but he is also there to wipe away your tears and to give you comfort, the comfort of knowing that death is not the end, the comfort of knowing that you will see your loved ones again, the comfort of knowing that endless joy awaits you in heaven, all because of the great love that Jesus showed you by laying down his own life for you. What greater comfort could you have than that?