

## **SERMON - RAISING THE SON OF THE WIDOW - Luke 7:11-16, October 8, 2017**

Jesus has absolute power over life and death. There are three cases reported in the gospels when Jesus raised someone from the dead. Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus when she was still lying on her bed. He raised the son of the widow of Nain while he was being carried in a funeral procession, which we heard today. Finally, in Bethany he raised his friend Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, who was already buried in a cave and decomposing.

Life at times is hard. Like the cycles of the seasons, life has its moments of soothing warmth like on a summer day, and its moments of the piercing chill of its winters. Today this widow is experiencing the chill of grief. But at the same time Jesus meets her and is there with her at this very difficult and trying time. And just like this woman today, when we grieve, if we hold on, we will discover that God walks with us too. God is able to lift us from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope. God can transform dark and desolate valleys unto sunlit paths on inner peace. There is always light at the end of the tunnel.

Jesus feels compassion and love for the widow, and he tells her not to weep. Jesus is not saying that we should bottle up our grief and hide our sorrow. Recently I watched the documentary about the Vietnam War. In war you experience the most horrible and terrible things that are unimaginable to those who have never been in battle. You experience things that no human being should ever experience, things that will change you and affect you for the rest of your life. In battle you don't have the time or luxury to express your grief. Your life and the lives of others depend upon you giving your full attention to the task at hand. In the documentary, one soldier told about how he was severely wounded and ultimately ended up in a military hospital. Lying in his hospital bed, like an overflowing river, he finally broke down and released all of those suppressed and pent up tears. A nurse came to him and advised him not to do that because he was an officer and he would be setting a bad example in front of the enlisted men. The soldier's sergeant heard what she said. The sergeant came over, sat on the edge of the officer's bed, and told the nurse, "He can do whatever he wants." It is unexpressed grief that causes all sorts of physical and mental ailments. Tears can be healing, expressing grief can prevent suicides. Jesus is not saying that we should not grieve, but that we should grieve with Christian hope. Even Jesus as a man wept when His friend Lazarus died. Jesus tells the widow not to weep because Jesus has compassion on her and will raise her son from the dead and restore her son unto her. One day the causes of all our griefs and sufferings will also end. It is love and compassion that motivated Jesus to become a man, to suffer and to die for our sins, and to grant unto all of us the gift of the resurrection and eternal life. We learn today that when someone dies and we suffer from grief, we must not despair. We must not become bitter. We must not lose faith. Everyone dies. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Kings die and beggars die; rich men and poor men die; old people die and young people die. Death comes to the innocent and it comes to the guilty. Death is the irreducible common denominator of all men." Death is not the end. "Death is not a blind alley that leads the human race into a state of nothingness. Death is an open door which leads man into life eternal. Let this daring faith be our sustaining power when we grieve and experience the death of a loved one.

Recently we heard of the death of Tom Petty, a famous entertainer. He was only 67 years old. He was making plans to retire from touring in order to be able to spend more time with his children and grandchildren. No one ever expects death to take us. We are always making plans. But like it says in the Gospel, death came to him like a thief in the night, and in an instant everything changed and he has now passed into eternity. Recently we heard of the tragedy in Las Vegas, and hundreds of lives were cut short. None of these people expected to die that day and they were all making plans for the future. The sister of one young victim said that we never know when death will take us and we should live every day to the fullest. Every

day is a precious gift from God. St. John Chrysostom reminds us that it is not the length of our lives that is important, but the quality of our lives. It is not how long we live that is most important, but what we did with our lives that will count. We can live for God, we can live to help and serve others, we can live to grow in God and contribute to make this world a better place, or we can squander our lives. And like the wise virgins in the parable whose lamps were full of oil, let us be ready every day, because we never know when the bridegroom will come for us.

In his final words of his final speech, Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." The next day an assassin's bullet took the life of this great man. In John 11:25-26, Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet shall they live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." Amen.