

**“I Say to You, Arise!”**

Luke 7:11-17

10 June 2007

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor  
Zion West Walworth United Methodist

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Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother’s only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!” The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has looked favorably on his people!” This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Prayer.

A widow;  
a single parent  
a female member of society,  
and because of her gender,  
she was now the outsider,  
simply because her husband  
had died.

A mother’s only son;  
in a society where  
the first born male  
is the one and only one  
lifted up  
to be the successor  
of the family’s birthright.

A mother’s only son;  
the last connection  
with her husband,  
now  
both gone,  
both dead,  
twice abandoned  
standing in the street weeping

as the crowd carried  
her son’s body on a bier  
to his final resting place.

The depth of despair  
is beyond which  
I could ever imagine.  
(May it never be so.)

Our Savior’s response  
is compassionate triage:  
first, he tells her,  
“Do not weep”  
He speaks with confidence  
as if words could  
correct this double tragedy.  
Secondly,  
Jesus turns,  
stops the procession,  
and speaks to the dead,  
“Young man, I say to you, rise!”  
You or I might question  
Christ’s confidence  
until  
we place ourselves in  
the shoes of this widow.  
She had no options.

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She had played her final card.  
 What once had been a life  
 full of hope and promise  
 ... a husband and a new baby ...  
 this day  
 we find her  
 with nothing left to loose.  
 She has nothing.  
 Nothing.

There are many occasions  
 in life in which  
 one could easily loose faith.  
 Trials and *discouragements*,  
 difficulties and troubles,  
 pain and suffering  
 disease and death;  
 any one of these things  
 has the potential to overwhelm.  
 Any combination  
 or multiples  
 of these  
 can destroy.  
 I've mentioned before  
 and I'm sticking to my word,  
 that I've never believed  
 the old saw  
 that God never gives to us  
 more than what we can handle.  
 I think this is baloney,  
 because I've worked  
 in psychiatric units filled with people  
 for whom  
 life has overwhelmed.  
 Too many waves over the bow  
 of even the greatest ship  
 will send it to the bottom of the sea.

What keeps me coming back to Jesus  
 Christ,  
 time and time again  
 to drink of his living water  
 and to find peace  
 living in his grace  
 is simply this:  
 the depth and breadth

to which Jesus is willing to go  
 to bring healing and wholeness,  
 a true balm in Gilead,  
 to our broken world.

Jesus is in the salvage business!  
 He's in the business of finding  
 the wrecked  
 the sunk  
 every poor soul whose  
 ship is stranded on the rocks.  
 Jesus finds the broken  
 and discarded  
 and offers  
 his living water.

"The dead man sat up  
 and began to speak,  
 and Jesus gave him to his mother."

Jesus gave him to his mother,  
 we are told in the Gospel.  
 The dead is risen;  
 and the risen is returned  
 to his mother  
 this widow with no name.  
 Words were insufficient  
 to fix this broken woman.  
 The triage principle simply  
 wasn't going to meet this need.  
 The only liberation  
 the only solution possible  
 was for Jesus  
 to step in and step up  
 to take responsibility  
 to salvage this lost soul,  
 to save this lost soul.  
 And save he did.

There was no earthly solution.  
 Flesh and blood had played itself out.  
 No human savior,  
 no doctor, no nurse,  
 no holy man or medicine man,  
 no one could do one thing.  
 Salvation was not of this world.

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Salvation was from Christ,  
and from Christ alone.

The salvage business  
is an interesting trade.  
Whether it is a junk yard  
or a garage full of clutter  
and a sign out in the front yard;  
salvage is many things to many people.  
Our recycling efforts,  
to return byproducts of consumption  
back to the resource stream  
to create new products  
is another form of salvage.  
Salvage is many things to many people.  
One might think  
of the growing green movement  
as the ultimate effort  
for the people of this planet  
to salvage itself,  
to restore, refresh, and bring healing  
to a scared world.  
Salvage is many things to many people.

As with salvage, so too is healing;  
so too is salvation.

I pray for miraculous cures.  
I pray that the dead might be resurrected.  
I pray that for every sorrow  
from every member of our faith community  
Jesus might stop,  
touch the funeral briar,  
command the dead to rise,  
and return the broken  
to the loving arms of their mother.  
Jesus tells us that  
if we have a need,  
ask.  
So,  
we ask.  
We ask in our prayers.  
We ask every Sunday.  
We ask Jesus to intercede.

Yet, it has been my experience

that God doesn't always  
fetch the stick we throw.  
God's ways are not always my ways.  
And that's a good thing.  
Really, it is.

It may be a bitter pill to swallow  
but God's grace  
... efforts to salvage,  
efforts to save,  
interventions to bring healing ...  
doesn't occur within  
our limited field of vision.  
It may be bitter,  
but this is a necessary  
facet of faith.  
God is doing greater things;  
God is working multiple agendas;  
God has different fish to fry.

So healing takes different forms.  
Miraculous resurrections?  
to be sure.  
But healing also includes  
the healing of mind and spirit,  
the restoration of relationships  
the building and maintenance of faith.  
Healing comes at times through death;  
for the Christian,  
simply the passing from this world  
into the next  
to be forever in the midst  
of the glory of God.  
Healing can come  
as the liturgy says  
"when sickness and illness  
of this mortal life has passed,  
when the earthly trails and temptations  
have now been ended,"  
that individual  
that child of God  
has now returned to God,  
"with whom now grants eternal peace."

Just as Jesus  
salvaged this un-named woman's life

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with the resurrection  
and return of her son,  
so is he in the business  
of saving your life, too.  
It is his desire,  
it is his intent,  
to keep you and me connected,  
returning  
to drink in his living water,  
to be fulfilled by his grace.

My beloved,  
may this narrative of resurrection  
give you hope.  
May it keep you praying.  
May it keep you returning  
to the one and only  
true Savior  
we've come to know,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

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