

Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. (NIV84)

Theme: The Lord saves with Compassionate Power

The loved-one of someone you know dies. What do you do? We have our customs that we typically follow: you might attend the viewing the day before the funeral to pay your respects or offer your condolences, or go to the actual funeral itself. You might send some sort of sympathy card or make the family a meal; others are in the habit of sending flowers, or sometimes give a memorial gift. Whenever you do come in contact with those who are mourning the death of someone they love, what do you say? I’m sure most if not all of us have uttered something similar to, “I’m sorry for your loss” as if you are responsible for their loved one dying.

There are reasons why we follow certain customs and say similar phrases at the death of someone we know. But have you ever wondered the purpose behind all of these things, or what good they do? A better question is to ask yourself, “what comfort do they give to those who grieve?” What comfort does sending flowers or giving a memorial gift do to those who are grieving the loss of someone they love? While it may be nice to know that you are sorry for their loss, it also doesn’t offer any real comfort.

Our text for today takes place the day after last week’s gospel. Jesus was in Capernaum where he heard of the faith of the Centurion and

healed his servant. He was in the first year of his ministry, but from his teaching and his miracles he was gaining in popularity. It was about 25 miles from Capernaum to Nain, where Jesus was traveling. A large crowd excitingly followed Jesus along with his disciples. No doubt, they hung on his every word as he taught them along the way. But as this large and joyful crowd came near to Nain, they came across another sizeable crowd. It was a funeral procession. A young man had died; and he was the only son of his mother. According to the Jewish custom, the friends of the widow did all the preparation for the procession. They hired mourners, musicians, and an orator who spoke about the deeds of the dead boy. Everyone followed the widow who was following close behind the dead body. The lifeless body was prepared with spices and wrapped in linen and placed on a wooden board to take it to the tomb, outside of the town.

The large crowd indicates that the town itself felt of widow’s pain and mourned with her. But because of the pain of death everyone was crying and wailing. As nice as it was that they mourned with her, they couldn’t offer this woman any real comfort. The crying and wailing and the speaking of the good deeds of the young man, didn’t raise her boy from the dead, or the sure hope of eternal life.

Crying, mourning—they are common at funerals. Death is unnatural—God never intended the body and the soul to be separated, but sin ruined God’s perfect creation. We know that the wages of sin is death and since we are all sinners all of us will die one day. There is nothing we can do to avoid it; it is a fate that we all face.

And all your loved ones will die one day as well. No one delights in the death of a loved-one. Most of us will bury our parents; half of you will bury your spouse one day; and some of us may even have to bury our own children. Death may happen to all people, but death still hurts—especially when someone you love dies.

Sometimes even a believer can fall into despair when death strikes thinking, “I am all alone in this world.” It could happen that we feel sorry for ourselves and when death comes we and think our lives are ‘over’. Now, I’m not saying that it is not right to mourn when death strikes; but it is not okay to fall into the feeling of hopelessness or despair.

When faced with our own mortality or that of our loved ones, our true character comes out—and it often brings out the worst of people. The same thing can be said about what lies in our hearts—where our hope lies, what is important in our lives, on whom or what our faith depends often becomes clear when we are staring down death or mourning the loss of someone we love. How we react at such times often indicates what we truly believe. And what we say to someone who is grieving a death shows them what you believe to be truly important.

So the joyful and excited crowd of Jesus and his followers met the sad and mournful crowd of the funeral procession. It's like a parade that runs into a funeral procession today—who yields to whom? We have that practice today, don't we? Out of respect for a funeral procession we yield to them and we might pull over to the side of the road. It was a different time and a different place, but you can imagine the joyful crowd suddenly growing quiet and hushing each other saying, “shh, it's a funeral procession.” And everyone looking at their feet because of the awkward situation.

But not Jesus. He walked right up the funeral procession, put his hand on the bier and those carrying it stood still. Why would Jesus do such a thing? Was he unaware of cultural *faux pax* of interrupting a funeral procession, or was he simply inconsiderate of the feelings of those who mourned their loved one? Of course not, the opposite is actually true. Jesus stopped the procession because he knew the situation of the dead man's mother. She was a widow and he was her only son. Back in Jesus day, woman didn't work. It was up to husband, the man of the family, to provide for the whole family. And if he died, then the sons would support their mother. This woman was a widow and now her only son was now dead. She had no one to take care of her and support her. Without any money she would eventually run out of money and would probably lose her home.

All the people—friends and hired professionals who mourned and wailed and beat their breasts didn't provide the widow any comfort. Those Jewish funeral practices didn't mention the resurrection of the dead and they gave her no hope or encouragement. So his heart went out to her—he had compassion on the widow. But this is no ordinary compassion. This word for compassion is always used to describe the deep feeling Christ has for us sinners. It is a word that indicates that Christ's compassion comes from deep within himself—from the

bowels, the seat of feelings and emotions for Jews; we might say from the bottom of my heart. Jesus, the Lord, was deeply moved for the sake of the widow. Her pitiful state moved him to mercy—and he rescued her from her pain. The Lord told the widow **Don't cry**. He is telling her “everything is going to be ok; there is no reason to be sad because I'm going to take care of you.”

So he turned to the man lying dead on the bier and said, **Young man, I say to you, get up.** There are many people who speak to a lifeless corpse lying in a coffin. But no one in their right mind would tell that person to get up, rise from the dead, and expect that dead, lifeless body, to start breathing again and become alive. But that is exactly what Jesus did because he's not just a man, he is also the Lord God. Instantly after Jesus spoke to him the young man sat up and began to talk. That is the power that Jesus has over death! By just speaking to the dead man, he was able to raise him from the dead! That is the power of Christ; death must listen to him whenever he speaks!

As great and wonderful as the power of Jesus over death is, our focus today doesn't fall squarely on it, however. Notice what Jesus did after the dead boy was brought to life—he gave him back to his mother. Again we notice Jesus's mercy and compassion. He didn't raise this young man from the dead for the sake of the young man, he raised him from the dead for the sake of his mother! So that his mother wouldn't be alone, so that she would be taken care of and provided for. It is Jesus' compassionate power that led him to raise the young man from the dead for the sake of his mother.

As Jesus had compassion on the widow, he also has compassion on us. He knows the sting of death, he knows the pain we feel when a loved-one dies, and the anxiety we face when we are faced with our own deaths. He knows that we are helpless to avoid death; and his heart goes out to us.

But the Lord doesn't just have compassion, he also has power. And that is what makes him greater than all of us. We can have all the compassion we can muster, but we can't save anyone or remove the sting of death. But that is exactly what Jesus did. This is the first of three instances in Jesus' ministry when he raised someone from the dead. But Jesus won the ultimate victory over death at the end of his ministry—three days after he died when he rose from the dead. Just as

death had to listen to Jesus, death could not hold Jesus down. He rose from the dead and defeated death.

And he promises us, **because I live, you also will live.** And, **whoever believes in me will live even though he dies and whoever believes in me will never die.** The gift of eternal life is received only through faith in him—those that believe in him will join him in heaven forever. Paul calls him the **firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** Jesus' resurrection is proof that we too will rise from the dead. When we die our soul will go to heaven and on the Last Day he will raise our bodies, perfect and glorious, to join our souls forever in heaven. That is the power of Christ; that is the result of his resurrection! Death then, for Christians, is not something to fear, it's not something that causes us to fall into despair, or mourn as if we have no hope. No, death is something we look forward to ourselves because it is the beginning of a perfect and eternal life with our Lord. And we rejoice at the death of our loved ones who believed for we know that they have passed this veil of tears and have received the crown of life because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

It is the Lord's compassionate power that led him to give up his life only to take it up again so that we may live with him forever. The Lord by his words to this young man and by his own resurrection has proven that he has power over death. And if he has power over death, he certainly has power over the things that cause death, and he has power over everything else that may cause us to mourn and weep. And his heart goes out to us in each and every situation. He is not a God who stands aloof up in heaven as if he doesn't care about us. He is filled with compassion no matter how serious the situation is. And he tells us, **don't cry.** Everything is going to be alright because he is with us, will take care of us, and most importantly give us a perfect life in heaven!

After Jesus showed his compassionate power and proved himself to be God, there were no longer two crowds, but one crowd—they were all filled with awe and praised the Lord for his mercy and power. And they couldn't contain their excitement. They spread the news about Jesus' compassionate power throughout Palestine and beyond. When someone you know has a loved one whom dies, what do you do and what do you say? Go ahead and follow whatever customs you want. It's not wrong to send flowers, give memorials, or something of

the like. But remember where true comfort lies. It lies in Christ and his compassionate power. Don't be afraid to share the gospel with them, to tell them about Christ who has power over death and has promised eternal life to all who believe in him. For our hope and comfort is found in no one or nothing else than Jesus. Amen.