

Jesus between the Seasons: *HIS POWER*
Luke 7:11-17

Last Sunday, we found Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth, reading the day's Scripture lesson for those who were gathered in the synagogue for Sabbath worship. He read from the prophet Isaiah:

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

Luke tells us that Jesus finished the reading and then told the congregation, in effect, "Isaiah was talking about me. That's what I plan to do. It's why I'm here." Jesus told them His purpose.

To the folks at church that day, though, what Jesus was claiming sounded like blasphemy. They turned against Him, and nearly killed Him; but Jesus' time had not yet come. He managed to get out of Nazareth and go back to the countryside of Galilee.

Some of those folks must surely have changed their minds about Jesus later--especially after hearing some of the things He did after that tumultuous homecoming. The seventh chapter of Luke's Gospel, for example—in which we find our text for today--gives us several reasons they might have had to reconsider what Jesus said —and what they thought about it.

Luke 7 begins with that well-known story of the centurion whose servant was ill. He asked Jesus for help, and the way he went about asking for help impressed Jesus. He not only healed the man's servant, Jesus commended him for his faith as well.

After this miracle, a large crowd followed Jesus as he left Capernaum and traveled to the next town. Let's read what happened, beginning with verse eleven:

Luke 7:11-17 ¹¹Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹²As 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.
¹³When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

¹⁴Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." ¹⁷This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

By the way, this region would have included Nazareth, so maybe by now the folks back home were having second thoughts about how they had treated Jesus. Both of these stories, the healing of the Centurion's servant, and the raising of the widow of Nain's son, speak to us concerning the power that Jesus manifested through His life and ministry--especially this story of the widow's son.

This comes from a book by Kent Hughes: "Joseph Bayly knew what the loss of a child was like. In fact, he and his wife Mary Lou lost three sons--one at eighteen days, after surgery; another at five years, with leukemia; the third at eighteen years, after a sledding accident. So when Joe Bayly wrote about the death of a child, people listened. Here's a part of what he had to say:

Of all the deaths, that of a child is most unnatural and hardest to bear. In Carl Jung's words, 'it is the period placed before the end of the sentence,' sometimes when the sentence has hardly begun. We expect the old to die. The separation is always difficult, but it comes as no surprise. But (what of) the child, the youth? Life lies ahead, with its beauty, its wonder, its potential.

Death is a cruel thief when it strikes down the young. The suffering that usually precedes death is another reason childhood death is so hard for parents to bear. Children were made for fun and laughter, for sunshine, not pain....In a way that is different from any other relationship, a child is bone of his parent's bone, flesh of their flesh. When a child dies, part of the parents is buried....

I met a man who was in his seventies. During our first ten minutes together, he brought the faded photograph of a child out of his wallet--his child, who had died almost fifty years before." [As quoted by R. Kent Hughes p.261]

Some of you know this pain first hand—and you are the only ones among us who could possibly understand and thus identify fully with this heartbroken woman in our text.

It seems ironic that the word "Nain" means "pleasant" or "delightful." On this particular day, anything good about Nain was overshadowed by something terribly dark, unhappy, and fearful. We call it "the shadow of death."

As Jesus and His crowd headed into Nain, they met a very distraught crowd on their way out of town. They were mourning the death of a widow's only son, and doing so without hope.

They were headed for the cemetery located outside the city walls. They were about to bury this boy--until they met Jesus at the city gate. I wonder if Jesus timed it to happen this way. Whatever...it was yet another opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate His power.

1. In this story, we see first of all how Jesus demonstrated the **Power of Compassion**. Look at verse 13: "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'" Other translations say, "He had compassion on her and said, 'Weep not.'"

And for good reason. Not only was there the pain of losing her child, but in that culture, there was a social stigma attached to this as well. Losing an only son would have been regarded as some kind of divine punishment for sin.

If you've ever heard someone say to a person who was grieving, "God must be trying to tell you something," you know this mindset and the hurtful remarks associated with it. Such comments are almost always unwise and lacking in compassion; but sometimes people say cruel and heartless things in trying to explain the unexplainable.

In our efforts to comfort others, we should certainly strive not to cause greater pain. Often, in fact, the most effective ministry that we can have with those who are grieving is simply being present and listening, and providing small acts of kindness and service.

But Jesus told this woman not to weep--which would not normally be a good thing to say—except that this was Jesus, and He was about to turn her tears into testimony. In His compassion, Jesus was able to do what we cannot do—so He was able to say what you and I shouldn't.

Listen to Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses..." Jesus wasn't being insensitive. He's

moved by the hurts and sorrows of people. He has compassion. He sympathizes with those who are hurting.

Notice how Jesus takes all the initiative in this conversation; and then He takes action, not in response to faith on this occasion—there's no indication this woman even knew Jesus—so this was not a response to faith, but simply a response to human suffering.

"Don't weep" is easy for us to say if the pain is not happening in our lives. We may well feel an urge to say it when the other person's tears are making us uncomfortable. But Jesus told this poor woman not to weep...because He knew her tears were about to become unnecessary.

2. Here's why: moved by compassion, Jesus now demonstrates His **Power Over Death**. While the rest of those with Jesus made their way to the side of the road to let the funeral procession go by—much as we do today--Jesus did a surprising thing and headed straight for the coffin.

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

Often, as with the Centurion earlier, Jesus responds to a person's faith. But here again, without any mention of faith, Jesus raises this young man and gives him back to his mother.

Someone has suggested that "perhaps Jesus did this deliberately to teach us that someday--even though we are not present on earth to exercise faith-- Jesus will make the grave yield its victims; our bodies will be raised again and claimed as we return...with our Lord."

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Thessalonica, wrote, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words." (I Thes.4:16-18).

We serve a powerful Lord and Savior, friends. His power over death and the grave gives us great hope. In my studies this week, I ran across a story by Joyce Hollyday. She tells of a school teacher who was assigned to visit children in a large city hospital. Her job was to try to keep them from falling behind in their school work.

This teacher received a call requesting that she visit a particular child. She took the boy's name and room number, and was told by the boy's teacher, "We're studying nouns and adverbs. I'd be grateful if you could help him with these."

It wasn't until the visiting teacher got to the boy's room, though, that she realized that it was located in the hospital's burn unit. No one had prepared her to see this young boy horribly burned and in great pain.

Though she surely wanted to, she knew she couldn't just turn around and walk out, so she stammered, "I'm the hospital teacher. Your teacher sent me to help you with nouns and adverbs."

The boy was in so much pain that he could barely respond. The young teacher stumbled through that English lesson, feeling rather ashamed that she was putting him through such a senseless exercise—at a time like this.

But the next morning, a nurse on the burn unit asked her, "What did you do to that boy?" The teacher began apologizing, but the nurse interrupted her: "You don't understand. We've been very worried about him. But ever since you were here yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back; he's responding to treatment. It's as if he has decided to live."

The boy later explained that he had completely given up hope...until...the teacher visited with him. Everything changed when she came. In tears, the boy explained: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a boy who was dying, would they?"

Hope is powerful. The hope we have in Jesus Christ is a powerful force in our lives. He enables us to celebrate the gift of life even when all we see around us is pain and disappointment and brokenness.

On the other side of the pain, there's life—resurrection! All things are survivable, all things are possible, when our hope is in a powerful Savior—our risen Lord.

3. Which brings us to this: the potential of Jesus' **Power in Us**. Look at verse 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.'"

Now remember, these were the very same folks who moments before had been heading heart-broken for the cemetery. Now they're awe-struck by the power of Jesus, and they're praising God. What Jesus did that day became powerful in their lives—which is the same potential that the power of Christ has in us!

General William Nelson served during the Civil War. He was involved in some battles up in Kentucky; but he was shot in the chest as he was relaxing with his men. It happened when a brawl broke out between some soldiers. Shots were fired, and one of them hit the General. The wound was obviously serious.

As his men ran to assist him, the General had just one request: "Send for a clergyman," he said, "I wish to be baptized." It seems he never took the time when he was younger. He never had the time before the war broke out. But now, realizing he might not survive his wound, his priorities changed.

The one thing he cared about now was preparing for eternity. He wanted to be baptized. The story goes that the General made his profession of faith that day and was indeed baptized. Thirty minutes later, he died." [as quoted in Christian Times, October 3, 1994, p. 26.]

A brush with death—and some of you have experienced this--will cause us to reexamine our priorities. Has an illness or the death of a friend or maybe a near-miss out on the highway ever caused you at least momentarily to change what you think is important in life?

Most of us shake off such thoughts pretty quickly; but, really, at the end of our lives, what means the most is whether or not we have settled this matter of where we're spending eternity. Everything else will take a back seat to this.

What Jesus did for this widow and her son shouts to us concerning our Lord's power over death. With this event, the message starts getting through that death is not the end. No wonder the crowd was filled with awe. We should be too, friends!

Even more so as we realize that the story of Jesus does not end with this one skirmish with death. We know that Jesus went on to defeat death...for all time. Listen to Jesus in Revelation 1:18: "I am he who lives and was dead and behold, I am alive forever more."

Now hear the Apostle Paul's testimony expressed in I Corinthians 15:54-57, "... then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Luke doesn't record for us the testimony of the widow woman whose only son was returned to her alive—but don't you know she had one! Maybe we'll get to hear it some day.

I heard about a man who had tried many different religions and philosophies, without sticking with any of them for long. In time, though, he became a dedicated follower of Christ. A friend, who was quite surprised at his conversion, asked him why, after all these years of searching, he had decided to become a Christian?

He answered: "It's like this: suppose you were going down a road and suddenly the road forked in two directions. You didn't know which way to go. Then let's say you met two men at that fork, one of them dead and the other one alive. Which one would you ask for directions?"

Only a powerful, risen Lord and Savior has earned the right to say to us, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."
(John 11:25-26)

After saying this, Jesus then asks the most important question we are called upon to answer in life: "Do you believe this?" In other words, "Do you believe that I am the resurrection...the life? Do you believe that those who receive Me and place their faith in Me will never die, but spend eternity with Me?"

Believe it, friend. Believe that Jesus Christ died to be your Savior and now lives to be your Lord. Believe so that the power of His living Presence will be in your life, giving you the hope and strength and grace to live life with victory! Thanks be to God!