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Emanuel's Ev. Lutheran Church, Bellevue, PA
2nd Sunday after Pentecost • June 6, 2010
Luke 7:11-17 • 1 Kings 17: 17-24

Our gospel lesson from St. Luke depicts a slice of our lives. The people at the center are in the midst of great grief. A widow and her community are mourning the death of her only son. We don't know how old he was. We don't know if he had been ill, or if his death was expected. We all know that parents are not meant to bury their children.

There were major consequences for this mother's life. She was a widow, so she had no husband. No job, no pension plan, no social security, no property in her own name. As a widow, her son would have been her economic stability and grounding in a patriarchal society. Now her only son was dead. With no husband or son, she effectively had no identity or resources. Thank God that her community drew around her. But this was more than just the emotional support that we rely on. She would have to depend on them for charity to have food and shelter. Her mourning was more than the loss of her son. It was the loss of her life and identity as she knew it.

We know what it is like to mourn the death of loved ones, as Ruth Demmler Benner's family was doing yesterday. Yet grief and mourning happen for many other reasons. We mourn the changes that we experience in life. Sometimes they are happy changes, like celebrating a marriage or a birth. Others are more sad – the loss of a job, or health, or a relationship. Regardless of the reason, change itself brings grief. We lose ways that life has been before, ways that we have grown to know and love. These changes impact the close community around us – our family and friends, our church family and neighbors.

I keep hearing of congregations that are mourning right now. To receive the new life that God offers us through the Spirit. Many, many churches are suffering as a result of the economic downturn in our country – not just Emanuel's. Congregations that used to be large enough to have multiple staff members need to pare down. Smaller congregations like ours are not sure what our ministry will be like in the future. As Emanuel's financial situation has become clear, I have heard the sounds of mourning in the voices of many of our congregation. We mourn these things that are out of our control. We grieve over the loss of the glory days that were. We can not seem to restore life to the way it used to be – and assume that there is nothing to be done. We settle down and go through our grief.

We have all heard the good news of the gospel. We must go through Good Friday, to see the apparent victory of death. Yet that is not the end of the story. The love of God, and the power of life, win. Death gives way to startling stories of resurrection.

In our gospel today, Jesus and a large crowd entered the town of Nain. They encountered a large group of people who were obviously mourning. Jesus greeted the widow by saying, “Do not weep.” *(Lk 7:13)* With his touch and his word, her son sat up and spoke. Life was returned to him.

Our scripture says “Fear seized all of them” *(Lk 7:16)*. This was not the kind of fear that we often imagine – they probably didn’t fear punishment. It was fear more like awe or honor. “[T]hey glorified God” *(Lk 7:16)* and honored how God was at work through the person of Jesus Christ. As good Jews, they would have known the story of Elijah well. They would have experienced this miracle a sign. God was working among them. Jesus must have been a prophet among them, just as Elijah had been. Buckle your seatbelts – things are looking up! And the people were stunned. In our scripture lesson, they watched in awe, beholding that God was bringing death to life. “[T]hey glorified God” *(Lk 7:16)* and then they spread the good news about God’s action.

Jesus also meets us in the midst of our grief over change and death in our lives, and over our concerns about Emanuel's future. He steps in and says, "Do not weep." (*Lk 7:13*) With a touch and word, he calls us to a renewed life as individuals, and as a people. "I say to you, rise!" (*Lk 7:14*)

Jesus' gift of life for the world invites our church to respond. Like the community in our lesson, we're: to witness what God is doing; to worship the Lord; and to spread the good news to all around.

The people witness God's action as a people. Jesus calls us to open our eyes and see what God is doing, even in the midst of disappointments. Where have you experienced God's healing and grace? How are our neighborhoods, and schools, communities and even our church being lifted up? Where do you see Jesus turning death into life?

Upon seeing, the people turn to God and worship. When we encounter God's love grace, the natural response is to give thanks for that gift. Through the word, Jesus invites us to be faithful in our worship life together. As we approach summer, that is an invitation to all of us to be renewed in our practices of devotion, prayer, and worship. Starting today, our gospel lessons each week come from the gospel of St. Luke. Emanuel's Adult Education committee challenges you – as one person, as close friends, or as a family – to enter more fully into this season. On your way out,

there are pink colored sheets with a schedule of daily readings from the book of Luke. You'll find the same sheet in your June newsletter. The readings for this week are listed in our bulletin. If you would like to receive an email with the day's reading, there is a sign up sheet in the narthex. Invite God to work through the reading of scripture in your daily or weekly life.

Also, consider worship with a renewed commitment. With all the excitement of summer, make the time to worship with us at Emanuel's. Is there someone whom you have not seen in a while? Call them and tell them so! Invite them again to join us in celebrating the good that God is working among us and around us. Will you be out of town for weekend? Seek out a community where you can still worship God and be fed by the word and sacraments.

After worshipping the Lord, with awe and glory, the people turn to others to spread the good news. All that comes before it – watching and worshipping – is preparation for acting as Christ's body in the world today. As members of Christ, we are to share God's love with others, serve our neighbors in the name of Jesus. I believe that when our eyes are renewed to see God, when our souls are fed by Word and worship – then we may discern how God calls us to reach out to our neighbors.

Christ speaks to Emanuel's: "I say to you, rise!" Brothers and sisters, God is sending the Spirit to fill these weary, grieving bones with new life.