

Luke 7:11-17

June 17, 2007 – PENTECOST 3, Father's Day

“God Has Come to Help His People”

‡ He dries our tears. (vv.11-13)

‡ He raises us from death to life. (vv.14-17)

In the name of Jesus, the soul's best Friend, dearly redeemed believers:

Could there be a sadder picture than the one before us here? Could there be a more joyful outcome? Many of us who have walked the lonely trail of tears behind the casket of a loved one know that not yet have we seen the rest of the story. Still today, *“we walk by faith, not by sight.”* (2 Corinthians 5:7 KJV) For the time being it is our great comfort and holy joy to know that **“God Has Come to Help His People.”** “In the midst of life we are in death,” yet even here our God has helped us. First of all...

‡ He dries our tears. (vv.11-13)

There would be no “Father's Day” for the woman at the head of the procession coming out of the little village of Nain. It was not far from the hometown where Jesus' fellow Jews had tried to throw Him off the cliff to get rid of Him. But He was just coming from His new base in the “village of comfort,” Capernaum, where last week we heard He healed the centurion's servant without even going to see him. But none of that would have been on the mind of this woman, only her great pain under the hammer blows of grief. Losing a son would be bad enough, but your only son? To have your only son get sick, grow weak, and slip into death would break the heart of anyone. But she was a widow. Losing both husband and son, how she must have stumbled as a large crowd of sympathetic neighbors followed the open casket to the cemetery. She must have needed help to walk. But none of them could dry her tears.

Most people would have gone the other way. A Jewish rabbi in particular had to be concerned about the law of Moses that forbade touching a dead body or anything it had touched. But this Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, did not spend His days with the religious elite trying to avoid ceremonial uncleanness. He once remarked, *“The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* (Luke 19:10) To be the Savior of the lost Jesus had to get down and dirty. He had to socialize with sinners without condoning their sin. In fact, He had to help them see their sin and its damning consequences before He could give them total joy in God's forgiveness. God had to let them cry before He dried their tears.

For all her crying this woman had still not run out of tears. She may not have even seen Jesus and the crowd with Him, so great was her grief. She could not have known how He felt at the sight of another sinner paying the wages of our sin in death. But from the very heart of God welled up the greatest grief in Jesus, for He understood better than anyone then or now how death is a violent intrusion into God's perfect creation. It was not meant to be that way. God's paradise had no room for death until Adam and Eve opened the doors with their rebellion. And Jesus Himself had come to undo death. But before He did, He spoke to the grieving widow's heart: *“Don't cry,”* He said, or more literally, *“Stop crying.”*

Jesus meant something totally different by that than we do these days. We're so busy trying to enjoy life, we attempt to laugh our way through everything. No doubt, a sense of humor can help at certain times, but Solomon was right in the wisdom of the ancient Jews. The Holy Spirit inspired him to write that there is *“a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:4 NIV) In fact, as one of the fruits of faith Paul mentions in his letter to the Romans he says, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”* (Romans 12:15 NIV) It's not to be like that summertime so many years ago when the family was gathered on the lawn and young teenage boys were chasing Frisbees at top speed. Who parked that “stingray” bike in the middle of the lawn, I'll never know. I just remember the screeching pain while my aunt laughed at the sight. My scar still isn't smiling, although she may have been the one who bandaged my leg.

My Savior has all the sympathy I need when heart and soul, body and mind are hurting. **He dries our tears.** “*Don’t cry,*” from Jesus always means He’s going to take away the grief and pain by the power of His almighty love. He still works for sinners like us, so unsympathetic when hearts are breaking, so irreverent when respect should be the order of the day, so lost in our dreams when the night calls for friends in faithful vigil with those who weep and mourn. **He dries our tears** because...

✠ **He raises us from death to life. (vv.14-17)**

Words are one thing, but then Jesus did the unthinkable. “*He went up and touched the coffin,*” no worries about the uncleanness of death. What power in His touch that *those carrying it stood still.* What the Roman centurion had trusted in Jesus’ powerful word to heal his servant, was now about to be tested beyond the limit not just of science, but life and death itself. Here is another example that shows Jesus was not just a fine man, a great religious leader, or an all-time famous prophet. To speak these words would either require the Son of God Himself, or this rabbi was a lunatic, and we can all go home. If the second is the case, there certainly will be no drying of our tears because then there would be no help when death tramps its sorry way into the fabric of our lives.

But “**God Has Come to Help His People,**” **He raises us from death to life.** Jesus said, “*Young man, I say to you, get up!*” Not even Elijah did that in our Old Testament lesson (1 Kings 17:17-24). That ancient prophet had to call on God for help in raising the son of another widow some 800 years earlier. But Jesus spoke the words Himself as the one true God with awesome power over life and death. So naturally, so willingly, *the dead man sat up and began to talk....* This was no zombie like the ones that terrorize towns in our movies. This was to be no mockery in the walk of the living dead. His mind and heart and tongue were alive to break the silence in praise of God who **raises us from death to life.** *And Jesus gave him back to his mother.* What greater gift on earth could a loving God have given?

I’m hoping you’ll read more details about what happens “When Life Meets Death” in this week’s *Meditations*¹ which are following the Gospel lessons for this summer. There you can almost see the waves and feel the salt spray in the writer’s description of being in a life raft after the sinking of his crab boat. What a lousy way to lose your life with your whole livelihood sunk to the bottom of the sea. But then piercing the darkness is the spotlight of a Coast Guard helicopter with a dangling basket and a rescue swimmer risking everything to get you and your crew up and away to safety.

Truly this is what Jesus has done for all of us by coming down here to rescue us, not just risking His life, but giving His life into death for us all. By His innocent sacrifice Jesus paid the wages of sin in one death for all, so that He as God could also give us the gift of God which is eternal life. (Romans 6:23) And how could we keep ourselves from thanking Him again and again for His superior skill and awesome power, His invincible love that **raises us from death to life?**

So it was at the little village of Nain, twenty centuries ago. *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.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.*

How will you tell what great things God has done for you? Maybe you can start by being like the two gold miners in this week’s *Meditations*. They struck it rich, but didn’t want anyone to know when they went into town for supplies. Yet even though they both kept their solemn promise and did not say a word, the whole town followed them back out to their claim. Why? Everyone saw gold in their eyes. “**God Has Come to Help His People.**” How can we keep this to ourselves. Maybe it’s hard to open up a conversation when so many in our society are chasing the “fool’s gold” of earthly pleasure. But let them see gold in your eyes and they’ll be asking you about it. When they do, may God spark His praise on our lips. “**God Has Come to Help His People,**” and we rejoice in Jesus! Amen.

¹ Order these daily devotions from Northwestern Publishing House – 1-800-662-6022.
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