

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It wasn't her first funeral. She had marched in a processional of death before. She was a widow. She had suffered the loss of a husband. That's hard. It breaks the heart. She was left without support, without companionship. As if that was not all she could bear, now she marches again. This time the processional bears the lifeless body of her son, her only son. Death carries away its helpless prey.

Her loss, the death of a child, is hard to imagine. Now she is alone. Now she weeps and mourns, for her hope is gone. We feel her horror. Our hearts break for her. For death has touched each of us. Each of us has felt its cruel thrust. We too have walked from church to hearse to grave bearing the remains of a loved one. It is a walk all men must one day take, it is a walk in which one day all men must be carried. Death is the curse of sin. In Adam all die. And dying sinners daily sin.

With each sin you have committed, you have come a little closer to death. By your anger, by your pride, by your covetousness and smugness and self-justification, you have shown forth outwardly that death is your due penalty. So each of us can see ourselves in the widow, for we have felt her loss.

And each of us can see ourselves in her son, for each of us will be carried as he was. Their processional of pain and heartache, of loss and helplessness, of grief and sadness, their processional is our processional. In the widow of Nain, and in the casket she follows, we see the fallen world.

But in the depth of her woe, death meets life. The virgin's Son meets the widow's son. Both are only-begotten. The boy begotten of sinful parents reaping the just reward for sin, the Man, begotten of His Father before eternity, born of the virgin in time. First, the virgin's Son prophesies. "Weep not!", he says to a hopeless, broken woman.

In His Words there is a promise. He is the cure for death. To touch the coffin of a dead man is to be ritually defiled, unclean. But the Lord is not made unclean, for there is no Law against touching an empty coffin.

What He does is more than a miracle to remain recorded in the Scriptures for eternity. What He does is for you. For He reaches out and touches the coffin. He steals the boy's death. He does not simply command the boy to rise, although He could have. He commanded Lazarus to come out and he did. Christ's Word is powerful, penetrating even death itself.

But the Christian faith is incarnational. God became Man. God took on the flesh of Mary. God has arms and legs, hands and feet. He took on Flesh to redeem flesh. He did not merely speak to the dead boy. God enfleshed touched the coffin, the God of life, the God of love, the God of forgiveness and mercy and grace. His strong Word was accompanied with an external sign as He placed His hand on the cabinet of death.

He takes upon Himself the boy's death, and the boy lives. Beyond her wildest hopes, He returns the boy to his mother. He takes upon Himself the mother's sorrow, and her heart, once broken

and empty, is filled with joy. He is the One that bruises and binds up, the One who wounds but His hands make whole. He empties the coffin and fills the crowd with awe.

Soon there would be another processional, a Triumphal Entry, in which in humility and meekness He would process into the City of Peace to submit to a merciless tyrant. But now, outside of Nain, He unseats the tyrant. He unseats death. With a Word and the hand that placed the sun and moon, He drives death out. And the boy lives. Thanks be to God.

And yet the Triumphal Entry will bring the same God Enfleshed into the city in which the Prophets were stoned and those sent by God martyred. The Flesh He took on would be torn. The hand that brought life to the widow's son would be pierced. The sorrow He took from the widow would be His sorrow. While He restored her broken heart, His heart would be pierced. The death He stole from the boy of Nain He Himself would die.

He who stopped the processional of death at Nain would Himself be processed, dead. He who emptied the coffin outside of the gates of Nain would fill the stony tomb outside the gates of Jerusalem, the Only-begotten of the Father processed in death, with no one to interrupt His funeral. He died and was buried, and His tomb was sealed.

And in that tomb was buried with Him the boy of Nain's death. In that tomb was buried with Him the widow of Nain's sorrow. For in His death the sins of the world were atoned for. He paid the price – death - that your sin, that your curse, that your death be taken from you and buried with Him. He suffered and died for you. And if you believe it, it is yours – freely, by grace, through faith in Christ – forgiveness is yours.

Beyond the virgin's wildest hopes, the Lord raised Himself from the dead. Her broken heart was filled with joy. But so too the hearts of all men of all times. So too you, dear Christian. For He died for your forgiveness, and He rose for your justification. He took your sin from you and bore it to Calvary. He took your death from you and made it His own. Your sin and death conquered, He rose to new life that you too live.

The Christian faith is an incarnational faith. God accompanies His saving Word with tangible elements. God touches you with the watery finger of Holy Baptism, as His Word of Promise works life in you. He commands you to come forth, and you leave your death drown in the font, and you rise to new life, life that cannot be taken away.

And that is true too for those you love, those who have faith in Christ. Even if they have stepped through the shadowy gate of the tomb, they live. They live because Christ lives. So mourning is vanquished, and the joy of the sure knowledge that they live, they live in bliss and felicity, fills your heart. And so too the Promise that you will be with them again.

The same Lord that touched the boy's coffin and brought life touches you. He touches your mouth as His Body is placed into you. Salvation comes from the Body of Christ. He touches your lips as His Blood flows from the Chalice and into you. The life is in the Blood. So His life is made your life, as your sins are forgiven, and as your faith is strengthened. For the voice that transcends death bids you eat and drink, the voice that speaks the Words of eternal life.

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity / Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2016 A. ✠ D.

A great Prophet has risen up, He has risen from death to life. Christ comes to you in His Holy Word, in the Washing of Regeneration, in Holy Absolution, and He comes to you in the Holy Eucharist, that He may dwell in your heart through faith.

So weep not, O Redeemed of God, for God has visited His people, God has visited you, to save you body and soul, to prepare you for the Day that He calls you forth.

Behold, this we have searched out; it is true. Hear it, and know it for yourself.

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