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Sunday, June 6, 2010

Sermon Texts: I Kings 17: 8-24
Luke 7: 11-17
Galatians 1: 11-24

Sermon Title: "God Still Rescues His People"

Sermon Topic: Jesus' special act of mercy and compassion

Sermon Purpose: To teach that God intervenes in the lives of his people.

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Sermon Prayer: God of life and God of love, hear us as we study your Word and teach the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Guide our hearts as we hear your words, this day and always. Amen.

I suspect I don't have to convince many of you that the saddest, loneliest, emptiest moments in life are those that we spend gazing at the back of a hearse on its way to the cemetery.

I can identify with the widow from Nain as she was in procession to the cemetery, following the cortege as they bore the remains of her only son to the graveyard. Quite frankly, I don't fear that procession – when it will be for me – nearly as much as I do the thought of being in the **lead car following** the hearse. I've been there a few times and – believe me, as others can attest – that's the longest and most painful ride you can ever take. That's where we are introduced to the widow of Nain. We meet her on the way to the cemetery. In her case, it turned out to be a most dramatic confrontation, and it changed her life!

Wanting Christ to intervene

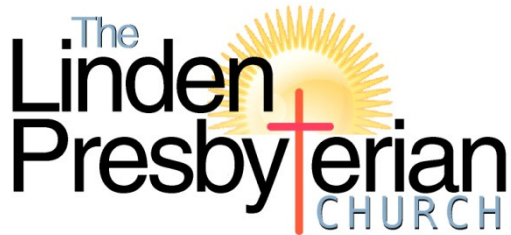
Don't you wish that Christ would do for you what he did for that widow in our Gospel Lesson, this morning? Meet you on the way to the cemetery!! Where is Christ, then, in that empty moment? Why does he not appear suddenly and do what he did in the seventh chapter of Luke? Doesn't our Lord perform any encores, like they do in the theaters? Why doesn't he halt the processions, anymore? Command that funeral director to open the coffin! Why doesn't he give that cry of command that would have changed our lives so dramatically? Why doesn't he cry out for **our** benefit, "I say to you, arise!!"

I suspect that because God **doesn't** do that, as he did in the apostolic days of the early Christian Church, that most of us **spiritually "fall asleep"** before Christ calls us to that **eternal "Good Night."** The sad result for many of us is that Christ remains distant and remote, and his presence is no longer personal or intimate. Ours is just a **religion** and not an uplifting **love affair** with the risen Lord.

Don't expect a dramatic appearance.

If Christ appears to us, it'll be through someone's **testimony** and probably not like he did to the





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widow from Nain. Don't **expect** him to stop the procession you're in on your way to the cemetery. But just because he chooses **not** to repeat this scene in Luke, chapter seven, for you, don't relegate him to the fringes of your life. Just because he doesn't reach out and stop funeral processions, don't lock all of his mighty deeds in the cobwebs of history. Don't expect him to be alive in you if you just mechanically go through the forms of religion and pay the premiums for the dividend of heaven. Neither can you lock up all of his miracles with the other relics of Christian history ... like God's dramatic Old Testament appearances.

But do expect God's rescue.

Let's focus on the widow of Nain. She was in a desperate situation. Her pain was real. God's intervention was dramatic. His rescue delivered her from the pits of despair. Consider her plight: In Roman society, there were three conditions of life that qualified you for being considered underprivileged, one of the "have-nots," and at the bottom of the ladder of society. These three ingredients were:

1. To be poor,
2. To be a foreigner, and
3. To be a widow.

To be poor was considered to be immoral. Today, we regard the poor as unfortunate and look on them with compassion. It was not that way in the days of the early New Testament Church. To be poor was like being a prostitute, a skid row bum, or to be a child molester. You were an undesirable. Women were kept confined to the home to take care of the children. They were considered to be **property**, rather than people. They were also to be kept pregnant in order to assure the continuation of the family. To be ever-pregnant was especially important because the infant mortality rate was so very high. Women were not allowed to appear in public. To be a widow with only one son was to be at the very bottom of the heap. **To lose that son was to lose everything! It was like being buried alive!!**

But Jesus rescued her! This text is not about Easter! No, the son died again later to be sure. This is about Jesus' compassion; it is about his willingness to intervene in our lives. Verse 14 says: "When Jesus saw her, he felt sorry for her and said, "Don't cry." He raised her only son as a special act of mercy and compassion.

God still rescues his people.

It's doubtful if God will raise our loved ones on the way to the cemetery, but if we open our hearts to him and let him manifest his mercy, he still visits and rescues his people. Sometimes he does it by drying our tears. Other times, he does it by bringing us closer to himself and holding us tighter. He does it by opening us up to his grace – perhaps through some financial setback. At other times, he makes us strong by using our weakness to manifest his great power.

Don't let his mercy and compassion be something remote and theoretical. Don't force him to make you poor, to strip you of all your pride, before he manifests his great mercy in your life. In Christ,





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you have a risen Lord, and he is all the Lord you'll ever need.

Your salvation is the center of his rescue.

A group of men were repairing a church steeple in Southern France. As they were working, one of them lost his footing and fell to the ground. His co-workers hurried down the scaffolding as quickly as they could, but they fully expected to find his mangled, crushed body when they reached the ground. Instead, they found their friend standing up, brushing the dust from his clothes. He looked at them and said, "I'm safe, but it crushed the lamb." It seems a shepherd was leading his flock past the church, and as the man fell from the steeple, he landed on one of the lambs, and that lamb broke the impact of his fall. "There," he said, "Look, I'm safe but I crushed the lamb."

That truth is at the center of our lives. Even if God doesn't meet us on the way to the cemetery and raise our dead, we are surrounded with his love, a love strong enough to dry our tears, to quell our fears, and to point us to the cross and to the empty tomb. The lamb was crushed, but we are alive. May you find sufficient strength and comfort in that to guide and protect you on your way, even if it is not the way to a cemetery. Amen!

