

April 21, 2013
Resurrection Stories

A Son's Resurrection
Luke 7:11-17

Opening words: Everyone knows the Easter story. Jesus was resurrected from the dead! However, not everyone knows the other resurrection stories. Did you know, including Jesus, nine individuals in scripture were resurrected from the dead? Of those miraculous resurrections, three are found in the Old Testament. Three individuals were resurrected by Jesus, himself. Both Peter and Paul were raised a person from the dead. In addition, an untold number of saints were resurrected at Jesus' crucifixion. (Matthew 27:52-53) Many believe Paul was resurrected after he was stoned (Acts 14:19-20). Each one of these stories is important. In the future, I want to look at them all. However, I only have time to look at the three individuals Jesus resurrected.

I have called this sermon series, *Resurrection Stories*. Last week, we began by looking at the story of Jairus' daughter. Next week we are going to look at the story of Lazarus. Today, we look at the story of the widow's son. May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson, Luke 7:11-17. Let me call this message *A Son's Resurrection*.

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

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

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." ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

"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 is 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.”

Do you know my greatest fear? Death! I am not speaking of my death. To this point, I have had a great life. I am speaking of the death of my children. That is one experience I don't want to have. Emotionally, I don't think I could attend their funerals. With that gloomy thought in mind, let us look at the Gospel lesson together.

We find ourselves this morning in the seventh chapter of Luke. Jesus is in Galilee, so his popularity is high. He has just left Capernaum, where he has just healed the Centurion's servant. He travels to Nain where he encounters a large crowd. They are not celebrating some local festival or someone's birthday. They have gathered because of a tragic death. They are mourning the death of a man. To be more exact, they are carrying his corpse. They are doing all they can to be helpful because they are concerned about this man's mother. This unnamed woman is the picture of nothingness. She is too familiar with the grieving process. In the past, she had lost her husband to the Grim Reaper. Now she has lost her son. Her future did not just include loneliness. Her future included poverty and hardship. Without her son, there will be no happy ending. Everyone's heart went out to her, but not a single person in that crowd would have traded places with her.

Today, I want to expose to you the three divine lessons found in this story. They are not really lessons about death. They are lessons about life. What are the three lessons? First, **life is hard**. Hardship is not just limited to this woman or her generation. I hate to say it. Life has always been hard and life will always be hard. Second, sometimes **we need people**. It is a good thing you don't have to face life's problems alone. You have family and you have friends. Third and finally, **you always need God**. There has never been a moment in your life when you were orphaned. God is always with you. God is the final answer. So if you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"**

Life is Hard

You know the story. Everyone knows the story. Eight year old Martin Richard was standing near the finish line of the Boston Marathon last Monday afternoon. He wasn't alone. He wasn't doing anything wrong. He was surrounded by his family. Everyone was having a wonderful time until two bombs exploded near them. Within a matter of seconds the family was decimated. Martin was killed. His mother, Denise, suffered a brain injury. His six year old sister, Jane, lost a leg. Martin's father, Ben, asks for prayers for his family. I ask that you pray for everyone affected by this senseless act. In all, three people were killed and 178 injured. Have you ever wondered what is wrong with our world? Have you ever wondered where our society went wrong?

Sometimes, life's hardships grab the headlines. Most of the time, they don't. Does anyone here find life to be easy? As a pastor I hear about other people's lives all the time. Many of the stories I hear have one thing in common, hardship! Sometimes, the hardship is caused by poor decision-making. You drank too much or you bought too much. You hopped into bed with a stranger too often. That kind of decision-making will lead to hardship. Sometimes, hardship enters our lives like an uninvited guest. You went to college on student loans but now you can't find a job. You were rear-ended in a traffic accident on your way to work and now your back will never be the same. You retired and your safe investments weren't so safe. How many people do you know who are struggling at this particular moment? What is your greatest challenge at this particular moment? How many of your youthful dreams have died?

First, the widow illustrates for us: life is hard. She had nothing. Her husband is gone. Her son is gone. The only thing that the future holds for her is loneliness and poverty. She had nothing. If you will admit life is hard, say, "**Amen!**"

Sometimes We Need Others

I know this next illustration is liturgically incorrect. This is Eastertide and during this reason we are supposed to be talking about the resurrection of Jesus. I am not going to talk about the resurrection. I am going to talk about his birth. You know the story. Mary was from the town of Nazareth. In her time, Nazareth had a population of between 100 and 400 people. Have you ever lived in a small town? Have you ever worshipped in a small membership church? Everyone knows everyone else. Everyone knows everyone else's business. This is the bottom line. In a time of high morals, Mary was a single pregnant woman from a small town. Everyone from that town, everyone in her life is talking about her unwanted pregnancy. She is the hot topic at the well. So she escapes Nazareth and visits her cousin, Elizabeth. Biblical scholars believe she went for two reasons. First, she goes to Elizabeth to escape the people in her life. Second, she goes to Elizabeth receive some unconditional love. Has there ever been a time in your life when you needed the counsel of someone else? Have you ever been the counsel for someone else?

One of the things I am so pleased to offer grieving people are bereavement lunches. I have never had a family yet tell me they have been disappointed. Everyone appreciates them. They appreciate it for two reasons. First, they appreciate the food. That head count is important because everyone has to eat. The food is always wonderful and I have never gone home hungry. Second, they appreciate the time. If you eat in a restaurant you feel like you have to leave. If you eat here you can stay as long as you want. You can visit with family and friends and not be alone.

Second, the widow illustrates for us: sometimes, we need others. Look at her story one more time. The woman had lost two significant people in her life, her husband and son. She is staring into an uncertain future. She has nothing, except friends. Verse 12 says,

"As 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." They were not there to carry the body. They were not there because funerals were fun. They were there to support this poor woman in her time of need. Sometimes, we need others. If you have ever needed someone else, say, **"Amen!"**

We Always Need God

Third and finally, the widow illustrates for us: we always need God. The crowd that surrounded her during that day would have left her by sunset. There is only so much people can do. God can do so much more. As the crowd was walking out of Nain, Jesus was entering. It was quite a coincidence. What is a coincidence? A coincidence is a little miracle where God wants to remain anonymous. How many coincidences have changed your life? Those coincidences remind us we are never alone. They remind us God is always present. We always need God. If you need God, say, **"Amen!"**

Ann Lamott is an American novelist and non-fiction writer. She is a little earthy for my taste but she has something to offer. Perhaps, you have heard this story? She tells the story of being a child. One evening she was playing with some other children. She was running around the house and stepped inside the hall closet. She shut the door behind her and stood in the dark. She was excited because the other children couldn't find her. She was having a wonderful time until she tried to open the door. It was jammed and she began to panic. She began to cry and called for her mother. Her mother ran to the closet door but she couldn't open it! Her mother called the local fire department. The minutes waiting for the fire department dragged like hours. The little girl grew more and more upset. The mother did the only thing she could do. She sat on the floor on the other side of the door. Then she slid her fingers under the door and told her daughter to touch them. At the moment the little girl touched her mother's finger tips she began to calm down. This is why we come to church during life's most challenging moments. We come to church because church is still your best opportunity to experience God. Would anyone here feel better just touching God's finger tips? And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

I end this message today by challenging you to admit three things. First, I want you to admit life is hard. Is anyone here finding life easy? Second, I want you to admit sometimes you need other people. We need other people. Third and finally, I want you to admit you always need God. He is the only constant in an ever changing world. Walter Martin once said, *"The key to strengthening spiritual muscle and enduring hardship is finding strength in God."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**