

“Do Not Weep”

William Cwirla

Luke 7:11–14

It's a rule at funerals – the younger the death, the bigger the crowd, the more grief and weeping there is. There is something deeply and profoundly tragic about death at a young age. No parent expects to bury a child. The grief is compounded at this funeral in Nain because the mother is also a widow. First her husband and now her only son. That meant not only the grief of death but also the uncertainty of the future. Her means of support died with her son. What would she do now?

Enter Jesus. He had just healed the centurion's servant with a word from a distance. But too late to save the young man from death, He shows up for the funeral. There is a collision of crowds at the city gate. Jesus and a great crowd that followed Him meet a great crowd of mourners carrying the body of the widow's son. Hope meets grief. Joy meets sorrow. A triumphal crowd meets a funeral procession. Jesus meets the grieving widow.

He sees her. He singles her out of the crowd with His gaze. She is the one He is looking for. He has compassion on her. He looks on her grief and loss with the compassionate heart of One who came to conquer Death. He speaks to her. His words are unlike any words of sympathy she will hear. These are not “mere words” but the words of Him who is the Word through whom all things were created. His words are Spirit and life, the words of eternal life. They are the very words of God, from the Lord's compassionate heart to her grief-stricken, broken heart.

“Do not weep,” Jesus says to her. Have you ever said that to someone? Has someone ever said that to you? “Big boys don't cry,” little boys are told. “Wipe those tears away.” “Stop crying.” Weeping is a natural thing, a good thing. But for some reason we are uncomfortable with it. People don't come to church during emotional periods in their lives because they are afraid they will weep. What better place to weep than in the Lord's house, among the Lord's people?

We view weeping as a sign of weakness, of having lost control. You must keep a “stiff upper lip” we are told. Our funerals often reflect the tightly controlled, bottled up grief. In many

mortuary chapels there was a special place for the family to sit, behind closed curtains, so that no one would see your weeping. It was not so in Jesus' day. People wept openly and loudly. Grief needed to be expressed, and weeping is how grief is expressed. This widow, on whom the grief of Death had fallen not once but twice, was weeping as she walked beside the bier carrying her dead son. They were tears of sorrow, anger, frustration, fear, sadness, despair. Tears only a mother can weep. Why? Why did her only son have to die in his youth? Why?

"Do not weep," Jesus says to her compassionately, looking at her with a gaze that pierces through the anguish and grief. If anyone else says, "Do not weep," it means little to nothing. You may safely ignore it. But when the Lord says, "Do not weep," His words do as they say. He wipes every tear from her eyes with His words.

He has more to say, not to the woman, but to her son. He places his hand on the bier. The pall bearers come to a halt. Jesus acts as though He were running the show. He is! He takes over the funeral and makes it His own now. He is in charge. He speaks to the dead man. Jesus can do that. He's the Lord. His words not only wipe away tears, they pierce through death and the grave. The dead cannot hear your voice, and you dare not speak to them. But they hear Jesus' voice.

"Young man, I say to you arise." And he does. He sits up on his burial bier, and he starts speaking too. What the young man said, Luke doesn't tell us. We never seem to hear from those whom Jesus raised. You don't need to know any of that. What you need to know is that Jesus spoke to the dead man and raised him up with his words. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. "Woman, behold your son." Her weeping turned to joy, her tears to laughter. All thanks to this man whom she did not know, who met her at the city gate and interrupted her son's funeral, who looked on her with compassion and dried her tears with His compassionate words. She would know whom to trust with her grief and with her death. Jesus had the words she needed. Only Jesus.

Imagine how the miracle might have played today. Jesus stops the funeral procession, goes to the back of the hearse, swings open the door, opens the casket and says to the dead man, "Get up," and he does. That would leave an impression. That's precisely what happened at the city gate in Nain.

At the tomb of His best friend Lazarus, Jesus wept. He wept over the unbelief of the Jews, over the anger of His friends Mary and Martha, over all that Sin and Death has done to us. No one

dared say to Him, “Do not weep.” “The wages of Sin is Death.” Death is what Sin pays out to every child of Adam. It divides husband and wife, mother and son. Death is the widow maker that brings grief and loss and sorrow into our lives. It drives our Lord to tears and to His death.

On the cross, the One who raised the dead died to conquer Death. Jesus is the Father’s only Son who came to put Sin to death in our flesh and to conquer Death and the Grave by dying. What He did for the widow’s son that day in Nain, He did for all on the cross. In Him, Death has lost its sting. In Him, the Grave has surrendered the victory. The raising of the widow’s son is a little preview of what is to come on the Last Day when Christ will raise the dead by His Word and Spirit and give His believers eternal life as He has promised.

There were likely many other funeral processions that day in Israel, and Jesus was at none of them as He was there at the city gate of Nain for this grieving widow. This was a sign for her and for each of you that Jesus’ words do as they say. They healed a centurion’s servant from a distance. They wiped away the tears of a grieving widow. His words raised a dead man from his coffin and reunited him with his mother. What a day that was!

You will attend many funerals in your life. The older you get, the more funerals you attend. Karen and I are driving up to Reedley later on today for the funeral of Karen’s Aunt Jenny tomorrow. She was old, but there will still be tears of grief. You will go to many funerals. Your parents, your relatives, your friends, maybe even a child of yours. You will weep too over what Sin and Death have done, over the wreckage of our humanity, and over all the loss that Death brings.

“Do not weep,” Jesus says to you out of His compassionate heart. “I am the Resurrection and the Life,” He says. “Whoever believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die forever.” We all must die. You must die. But not eternally. Not forever. And baptized into Jesus, your death has been claimed by another. You have been buried with Jesus in His death. Your life is now hidden in Christ who will raise you on the Last Day.

He gives you the tokens of His death and life, His own Body and Blood, which He offered on the cross to save you. “Take and eat, drink,” He says to you. “Whoever eats of my flesh and drinks of my blood has life in him, my life, and I will raise Him up on the Last Day.” His Body and Blood which He gives with His words have gone through death and the grave. They are

death defying, the “medicine of immortality,” the anti-serum to the sting of Death. He gives these gifts to you in His Supper that you may know with all certainty and believe without doubt that He will raise you as surely as He raised the widow’s son.

Jesus’ words do as they say. He is the Lord. With His words, He forgives you all of your sin. With His words, He gives you His Body and Blood, His death and life. With His words, He sustains you. And with His words He will raise you up on the last day and wipe away every tear from your eyes. Weeping may remain for a night. Now is the night of weeping. There is much reason to weep in this world filled with sin and death. But rejoicing comes in the morning, the new day, resurrection day.

What Jesus did for the widow at Nain and her son, He does for you in your Baptism, in His Supper, with His words. Hear Him, receive Him, believe Him. He has the words. And you have His life.

In the name of Jesus,

Amen

SOURCE

William Cwirla · Luke 7:11-14 / Pentecost 3 (Proper 5C) / 9 June 2013 / Holy Trinity – Hacienda Heights, CA · Text: Luke 7:11-14
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hacienda Heights, CA (htlcms.org), ““Do Not Weep””, posted 2013-06-09
(<https://htlcms.org/2013/06/do-not-weep/>).