

## **“Live free” Luke 7:11-17**

**11** Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. **12** As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. **13** And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." **14** Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." **15** And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. **16** Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" **17** And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There are some aspects of events which we can see better when we are in the middle of them, and there are those which we can discern much better only from the distance; some time later.

The same we can say about this event which we just heard. There are things which the people who were present when this happen saw better than we, and there are dimensions of this event which we can see clearer than they.

Let's take a closer look at what happened and see what does it means for us.

This time Luke is portraying quite clear picture for us. Jesus, and together with Him also a great crowd went to a town called Nain, not far from Nazareth. As they were drawing near the gate of the town, they saw a man who had died and who was being carried out. He was the only son of his mother and she was a widow.

It is quite vivid picture, this woman was widow, she already had lost her husband and know she had lost her only son. A very sad story – it is the least we can say. But this situation looked even worse from the perspective of those who were present. We need to look at it through their eyes.

The society at the time of Jesus was different. It was much more patriarchal than it is today. Husbands, as the heads of family, played much larger role as those who were responsible for family's wellbeing. They provided for family, they protected it. Woman, on the other hand, didn't have too big role in a society, they mostly were responsible for a household.

If it happened, as in this situation, that a husband had died, then a son would take care of his mother. But as we read, this woman was left with nothing. No husband, no son, no one

who could take care of her, in fact, no future. Unprotected, with no one to rely upon, she was in a totally hopeless situation.

Our society is different. Each individual can be very self-sufficient, it doesn't matter a man or a woman. Sometimes to the extent that even a family is no longer needed. With enough money we can buy almost everything. Not everything, but almost everything.

However, there still are situations where we are as helpless as this woman was. When it comes to our health, when it comes to our life, there is not much we can do. Our resources can help to get the best treatment and to extend our lives a little bit, or sometimes these struggles with terminal diseases seem more like a prolonging of death. But when death comes, we are totally unprotected, totally helpless. No resource can help us. Besides, it can come in so many different, unexpected ways.

Back to the event. In English translation of Luke's gospel we read that Jesus had compassion on her. Greek word which is translated as "have compassion" actually means that 'all his guts were moved'. I guess we can recognize this feeling when we are faced with such a situation where we can almost feel that our guts are turning around – so strongly we experience that this is so wrong, so unjust, so desperate.

These were emotions which overtook Jesus, when He saw this poor woman in her misery and decided to intervene. "Stop weeping!" He said. The next thing we read that Jesus came up and touched the bier, and bearers stood still.

This action wouldn't mean much to us. What a big deal if by touching the bier He stopped the bearers. But it was a big deal for all those who saw it. We may wonder - why?

We remember that the foundation for the faith of the Jews were the five books of Moses, the same we have in the beginning of our Bible. The third book is Leviticus and it deals very carefully with different rules of purity and cleanness. One of the worst things that could be done was to touch a corpse.

By touching a corpse one touched death which was the very opposite of life and light that came from God and His order. This made any person ritually unclean for quite a while. It meant that this person for a while was cut off the blessing that came from the presence of God in the Divine service.

This is exactly what Jesus did. He went to the dead man and touched him.

By this He would make Himself unclean. Even today we know how encounter with evil situations make us dirty. We don't need to touch a corpse. We know that when we have experienced something really bad we want to go and to wash this feeling off.

When any kind of violence is done to us. When someone has robbed our house, touching everything that is so dear to us. When we have been exposed to open manifestation of sin, as hatred, as greed, as addictions, violent death or sexual perversions... we feel like dirty, we want to wash it off.

We also know that when it happens then it doesn't matter how good persons we are, our goodness doesn't change this evil into anything good. Evil remains evil, but we are made unclean. The power of sin is so much stronger than we.

This, as we read was not the case with Jesus. Jesus had to become unclean and impure, but it didn't happen. Instead, as we read "he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."

This is not something people experience too often. Instead of being affected by sin and death, Jesus Himself affected sin and death. Death as an ultimate expression of sin didn't have any power in the presence of Jesus.

Instead, happened something unbelievable. Jesus just said: "Young man, arise!" And the dead man awoke. Just so. That easy. Death, go away! "I am resurrection and life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26)

We see this life giving and restoring power throughout the Jesus ministry. Whenever He was present, all sicknesses were healed, and it didn't matter what He did; touched someone or just said a word, the sick person might not even be present, as we read it in the last week's Gospel text, and it still worked. He even raised the dead, and not just once.

What would be our reaction if during the funeral someone would stop at the coffin and would say to the dead 'I say you, arise!', and he would arise. What kind of power is it? This simply cannot be so! For us that is normal that people die, not that they raise again.

We are used to the triumph of the sin and death. We acknowledge that they are stronger than we. There is nothing that we can do. Just imagine how much what Jesus did is against everything we have experienced. The order of the world, as we know it, was shaken and subverted.

"Fear seized them all." It is understandable that seeing something like this people were afraid. The mightiest power against which no one could stand suddenly in subjected. But this is also fear from unexplainable. What is going on, is this for the good, or for the bad? The reaction of the crowds who saw what Jesus did was exactly the same as it would be if something like this had happened before us. They were afraid. What is it?

There is only one who could hypothetically triumph over death. The One who Himself is very life, the source of all life. He can just open His mouth and say: “Arise!” Everything in the creation listens and obeys as He speaks. Everything, even death.

“And they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”

Again, what are they saying? Great prophet? God has visited His people? What does it mean?

When Moses had lead the Israel out of Egypt, at the mount of Sinai they had this incredible theophany, when God came down in the clouds of fire and thunder and spoke to entire nation. They were so afraid that they begged that Moses alone would speak to God and then to them.

Then God gave a promise: “I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.” (Deut. 18:18-19)

People who witnessed this event realized that, perhaps, Jesus is this promised great prophet. But they also realized that “God has visited His people.” For us this may sound as simple words. But they meant much more for the people who witnessed what had happen.

For many centuries the Old Testament prophets had prophesized that one day the Lord God will visit their people. This visitation was to be both the grace of God and the judgment of God. This was to be a day, when the dead are raised again, when the power of evil one is destroyed and when the goodness of God’s creation is restored. This was the day when God’s kingdom would be revealed among men.

They were right on both of these points. Jesus was the great prophet promised by God, and He was God Himself coming to judge the evil and to restore the justice, to bring the life where death had reigned.

**What does it mean for us today?** What can we see from the distance?

We are mortals. All of us. We have acquired incredible knowledge about this world. But we don’t know what to do with death. It seems to be so inevitable. No one can escape it. And still, it seems so wrong; why would we end up losing everything?

If we think for a while then entire our lives is all about fighting for life. Everything we do is an effort to secure our life. To grant everything that is necessary to preserve our life. Beginning with food and cloth and shelter, then going to the next level and trying to get

better education to secure better jobs, that would help us to keep our life quite save. Then add on top of that all the possible insurance and saving options.

Then one day, when we have strived so hard, when we have made such sacrifices... sorry, you are terminally ill. At the end we always fail. Death is stronger than we.

If we can deceive ourselves thinking that we ourselves, and not our Father in Heaven, provide daily for all that we need, then death comes as a revelation which unmask this harsh reality that we are enslaved by death, and there is nothing we can do to liberate ourselves.

We can't. But there is One, who can and who has done everything.

Jesus was the Son of God. The Holy One. Nothing sinful can endure God's holy presence. When Jesus touched sickness, it was destroyed, when Jesus took upon Himself our sins, they were destroyed. When He touched death, the death was destroyed.

He has done it all. He is the very source of life. He is resurrection and life. When we were baptized, each of us was joined to Christ. As one body. As one holy Christian church. He took all that was ours; our sin, our sickness and death and gave us all what is His - His life, His holiness, His eternal kingdom. What a deal for us!

When God put His name on you in the Holy Baptism, you were purchased and freed from all sins and from death. You are not anymore subject to death. We are free. Free to belong to Him so that we can live under Him in His eternal kingdom and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

This is the message that Jesus sends us. We are free from the death! We don't have to fight for our lives. Of course, we will all die in this flash. So that we can receive our new restored and glorified bodies.

We belong to Him, we are joined with Him, and He is resurrection and life. He has proved it before the eyes of hundreds and hundreds witnesses. "Whoever believes in Him, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Jesus shall never die."

What a wonderful exchange! There is only one thing we need to do. To pray that the Holy Spirit would help us to accept this incredible gift. The truth is that we are free. We belong to Christ. We are heirs of His eternal kingdom. We all. Yes, you, you, you.. not someone else, but exactly you.

It is most certainly true. And still, we need to remind it to us again and again and again. This is not about someone else, it is about you. Christ did it for you.

But how it helps, if we don't enjoy this wonderful gift, if we don't live as free! If our main concern is still about our daily bread. As if we and not our Father in Heaven grants it to us. If we are still concern about protecting and securing our lives ourselves? If we spend our time, our energy, our money, our relations, all our resources to build imaginary wealth here, where one day it all will be gone.

The last week I heard about congregation, small, shrinking congregation, who has million on their bank account. They don't use it. They don't share with it. This is their insurance. This is their protection. This is the source of their life. They are anything, but free...

Don't be deceived. Trust the Gospel of Christ. God gives your life and all that belongs to is as gift. True life. Eternal life! It is yours already. Granted to you. Enjoy it! Share with all that is given us here on earth. Allow God to grant you His joy and peace when you freely serve Him, serving all people in your lives with all that God has given to you. Live free.

This one thing we need. Jesus has done everything else. There is nothing we should add. We just need to pray to be able to accept God's incredible gifts. To accept and to trust Him with all our heart. Jesus has shown how much God loves us, He has set us free, He continually forgives when we do wrong, He continually invites us to enjoy His gifts. Just believe and accepts His wonderful grace, and be sure that life eternal is already yours. You are free, live and rejoice.

Amen.