

Jesus Ruins Funerals!

Trinity 16
Luke 7:11-17

#1113
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Did you know that Jesus ruined every funeral that He ever attended? Consider what we just heard. As Jesus approaches the city of Nain, He meets a funeral procession. Obviously, all of the funeral arrangements had been made. The dead young man was in his coffin. The pallbearers were leading the procession as they carried the young man out of the town. Behind the casket came the young man's grieving mother. She had no other family members to help and support her, so close friends were escorting her as she wept. And there were, no doubt, the professional mourners, people actually hired to weep and lament the death of this dear young man—you know, put everyone in the proper mood for mourning. They had all of their fine funeral arrangements made, and they were going out to finish the service by burying the young man in the family tomb. But Jesus comes along and ruins this perfectly good funeral!

Some time later Jesus ruined another funeral—the funeral of Jairus' daughter. When Jairus approached Jesus, he simply asked the Lord *"to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying"* (Lk. 8:42). Jesus was momentarily distracted and delayed by a woman ill from *"a discharge of blood for twelve years"* (Lk. 8:43). She touched Jesus and was healed immediately as power went out from Him. After Jesus had healed this woman, someone from Jairus' house came and told Jairus: *"Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more"* (Lk. 8:49). You would think that Jesus would respect that. Now the family needed to make funeral arrangements. But Jesus loves to ruin funerals, and so He decided to ruin this one before it even began. When He arrived at Jairus' home, He took Peter, James, and John, and the girl's father and mother into the house. He told all the mourners not to weep because she was only sleeping, but they thought He was crazy. They knew that the girl was dead! Then Jesus took the girl by the hand and said, *"Child, arise"* (Lk. 8:54), and she did. Jesus ruined this funeral before it even began!

And who can forget Lazarus! I mean he had had his funeral; he had been buried. Let him rest in peace! Let the family, especially sisters Mary and

Martha, get on with their grieving. But no! Jesus insisted on raising Lazarus. Oh, sure, Martha and Mary believed that their brother would rise on the last day, but Jesus was talking about raising him now, four whole days after he had died. So Jesus wept and sighed and prayed, and then *"He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out'"* (Jn. 11:43). And when everyone saw Lazarus come out of the grave, they knew that his funeral was all in vain. Jesus ruins funerals!

So, Jesus went to three funerals, and He ruined every one of them. All three funerals ended in resurrection. I sure hope that Jesus comes to my funeral, don't you?

You see, dear saints, this is what makes Christian funerals different from any other kind of funeral. Jesus comes to meet death – your death and mine – head on. And when He collides with death, He conquers it, for you and for me. So, Christian funerals are not, as many people think, about celebrating the life of the deceased. No, Christian funerals are about the Life of Jesus—the life that cannot be held by His cross or His grave, the life that energizes the whole world, the life that transforms you and me and refashions us into God's image. Let's thank our gracious God that Jesus, His incarnate Son, comes to ruin our funerals, so that we can have life and fellowship with God.

Let's remember these three funerals that Jesus ruined. Remember how He raised Jairus' daughter. She was a young girl and barely dead. Remember how He raised the widow's son. He was a young man, providing for his mother. He had been dead only long enough to be prepared for his the funeral but not yet buried. Remember how Jesus raised Lazarus. It's thought that he was an older man, and he had been dead four days. Not only was he already buried, but, as people thought in those days, he was beyond hope of resurrection. What does all this mean? No matter how young or old you are, no matter how long you may rest in the tomb, Jesus still comes to ruin your funeral and raise you to life with Him. By His death He conquered death, and in His Resurrection, He gives life for all to have and enjoy.

Now, this is very good news, because we live in a world plagued with death. Six years ago death and destruction gripped our nation when terrorists attacked us on our own soil. Merely saying the words “September 11” brings to mind crumbling towers and 3000 dead. Two years ago Hurricane Katrina brought more death and destruction to our land, especially in and around New Orleans. We can’t say “Katrina” without thinking of death in some form. And, of course, death hovers over our land in the holocaust called “legalized abortion.” What a horrible spectre! Let the story of Jesus raising the widow’s son be your Easter hope in the midst of national death. You see, Jesus comes to ruin funerals; He comes to conquer death and give life; He comes to us who hate death because He hates death even more than we do.

But we don’t have to wait until we remember September 11, or the tragedy of New Orleans, or even ponder the abortion holocaust to worry about death. Each of us already faces death each and every day. You see, death lives in us. It’s what leads us to give in to our passions, those self-serving desires. It’s what leads us to turn from God’s merciful care. It’s what leads us to do wrong to another person. It’s what leads us to injure God’s creation. The death that lives in us causes us to “look out for number one” in so many ways. You see, when you are looking out for yourself, you are really trying to defeat death on your own terms, with your own ingenuity, with your own cunning. The disease of death leads a health nut to think that he can extend his life based on what he does or doesn’t eat. An overeater thinks he can keep death at bay and enjoy life the more he eats. The thief tries to keep death at bay by stealing and trying to find life in material goods. The town gossip tries to find life by putting other people down or spreading news, whether true or false. Yes, we all must face the death that lives in each of us, but we cannot conquer it; we cannot give ourselves life.

That’s why Jesus comes into our midst, just as He came into the village of Nain. That’s why Jesus stops not only our physical funeral processions, but also the processions of our daily attempts to give ourselves life. He tells us not to weep, because only He, the Son of God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, can give life. When Jesus says to the young man, “*Be raised,*” He is also talking to you. He is raising you from

the death of your sin. After all, you live in your Baptism. You’ve been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. That’s where He truly stopped your funeral procession and ruined your funeral long before it happens. And remember this when you come to the Lord’s Table today. When you eat and drink the Lord’s Body and Blood, you consume Life itself. There’s nothing better for ruining a good funeral than the Eucharist celebrated often and regularly. After all, it is the very medicine of immortality. As you eat and drink, this day and every Divine Service, remember that Jesus is putting His eternal life into you. He is giving you His life so that you can love Him and serve your neighbor. Even at this Altar, with this very Body and Blood, Jesus is already ruining your funeral.

The 4th century pastor Ephrem the Syrian said this about today’s Gospel reading: “The Virgin’s son met the widow’s son. He became like a sponge for her tears and as life for the death of her son. Death turned about in its den and turned its back on the victorious one.” Yes, Jesus soaks up our tears as we remember and mourn national tragedies and the devastating death that comes with them. Yes, Jesus soaks up our tears as we face our own mortality or as we confess the many sins we commit, vainly trying to give ourselves life. But remember this: Jesus soaks up our tears. In fact, He soaks up our tears by weeping with us, because He hates death even more than we do! That’s why He comes to ruin funerals. But also remember that Jesus came to be life for the dead young man, and for us. Yes, His death on the cross caused death to turn around and cower in its den. And the same goes for you. Jesus comes to ruin your funeral by giving you His life. And when He gives you life, He gives you back to each other so that you can serve one another and together rejoice in the life that He gives, both now and into eternity. Amen.