

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Trinity 16 – September 15, 2024**  
**Luke 7:11-17 – Do Not Weep**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Death is a reality of life. And death brings our sin to remembrance. As the widow of Zarephath said to Elijah, when her son died, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!”

In a sense, she was right. Elijah did not come to kill her son, but death does bring our sin to our remembrance. If death does not remind you of sin, it should. Because as Romans 5 teaches, sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. All have sinned. All have inherited Adam's sin. All are guilty and deserve death. So no matter how good a person was, no matter how cheerful and loving, we know that sin is the cause of death.

This is why a eulogy is inappropriate at a funeral. It makes no sense to get up before a gathering of mourners and tell them what a wonderful person this dead person was. That sort of comfort is empty and meaningless. It doesn't change the facts that this loved one – however good he might have been – today he's in a coffin. And we're about to put him in a hole and cover him with dirt. And until the Lord returns, we will never see him again or touch him or kiss him. For this person was a sinner, and as a consequence of his sin, he is dead and gone.

So praising the dead in a eulogy or “celebration of life” is only superficial, hollow comfort. It cannot deal with the obvious problem of sin and death.

Yes, death is obvious. We see it all around us. Children think about it from a young age. And death follows us all our lives – in the midst of life we are in death. All injury or suffering or pain – it all reveals our mortality. We're not invincible. When we get hurt, it takes time to recover. Sometimes we never recover. We grow old. The longer we live, the more times we have to say goodbye to those we knew and loved. So we grow more acutely aware of our frailty and helplessness day by day.

Wouldn't it be better, rather than trying to conceal and avoid the topic of death, wouldn't it be better to acknowledge it and confront it head on? Why should we lie to ourselves? Why should we say people are basically good, when they're not? If we want to find any real comfort, first we have to acknowledge the problem: death and the sin that causes it. Because denying sin takes away from the glory of God. It makes it all about us men and the good things we do, rather than about God and what God has done for us for Jesus' sake.

So in our funerals, we focus on the gospel. We never speak false, superficial comfort. We speak true, eternal comfort. Comfort that has power. Comfort that comes from the one sinless Man alone, Jesus Christ, God himself. The God-man who died and rose that all might live in him.

And at funerals, we do keep the eighth commandment. We defend and speak well of people. We focus on the good and overlook the bad, explaining everything in the kindest way. But even more importantly, we focus on the source of what makes any Christian good: true goodness is never from ourselves but from Christ himself, Christ at work in us.

The point is that when we encounter death, it should bring our own sin to remembrance. I am the chief of sinners, I deserve God's wrath the most. If this person that I loved has died because of sin, how much more do I deserve to die? For the log in my eye is far worse than the speck in his. I deserve nothing but death, for my own most grievous fault. That is a terrifying thought.

So don't try to tell me that sin is no big deal, that I don't need to worry. That's a lie of Satan, empty of comfort. No, let me face the facts. We die because we sin, and death brings my sin to remembrance, that I am a sinner, so that I can repent while there is still time.

The widow of Zarephath harbored no delusions. She knew that death is the consequence of sin. “You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” And surely, the widow of Nain also knew the same in her heart, as she walked in the funeral procession, carrying her only beloved son out of the city to bury him in the ground.

So whenever you encounter death, when you see its consequences, whenever you suffer pain and heartache, or when your heart is moved with compassion for those who suffer, let these things bring your sin to

remembrance. But do not despair. Turn from your sin to Jesus. Repent and cast yourself on God's grace and mercy. For his mercy endures forever. Then you will be ready for true comfort, real comfort, heavenly comfort in the living Jesus, the man who died and rose, and in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

Then you will be ready for the compassion of Jesus. "As [Jesus] 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. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"

Do not weep? Why not Jesus? My only son has died. My hope, my joy! No mother should have to bury her son. God has taken everything from me, why shouldn't I weep?

No, says Jesus, "Do not weep." Do not weep because I am your God, and I have come to comfort you. I have come to undo your sin, to erase death, to wipe every tear from your eyes. In my compassion, I have come to die in your place, in place of your dead son, in place of you and all the sinful sons of Adam who ever died in their sin, from the dawn of creation until today. For I am without sin. No, better than that. Not only do I have no sin, I've come to live in perfect obedience to all the law, to love God and all men perfectly, to do everything the law commands, and offer all of it up to my Father in heaven – my passive and my active righteousness – to die in your sin, that you may arise in my righteousness.

Therefore, Jesus touches the bier. "Do not weep," he says. And then, because his comfort is not hollow and empty, but real and mighty, then Jesus says, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

No platitudes, no wishful thinking! His words are filled with power. For he is the living Word who breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, the living word who now breathes through nostrils like ours. When he speaks, creation obeys. The sun stops, mountains are thrown into the sea, sin is forgiven, and even the dead are raised.

"Arise," says Jesus, and death is reversed. The dead man sits up and begins to speak, and Jesus gives him to his mother. Thus he wipes every tear from her eyes. And he will also do the same for you. "Then death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

This is true, lasting comfort. Comfort that has power. Real comfort for sinners, face to face with death. When you encounter death, when you're terrified by God's wrath, when God brings your sin and guilt to remembrance, then you have this mighty hope. That Christ is risen, and on the Last Day he will raise you and all the dead, and give eternal life to you and to all believers in him. Not just can, but will. For he is true God, who is not only able to raise the dead, but who will do it, as he has promised.

Fear seized them all, it says, when they saw the dead man sit up. Fear, because they recognized the power of Jesus Christ, true God. Fear, because they recognized their sin. And sinners cannot stand in the presence of the living God.

But Jesus came to cast out fear, along with sin and death. He came not to ignore sin and death, but to speak the truth. So listen to this, his truth: You are a sinner, you deserve to die, but the atoning payment of Jesus has put death to death in you. And today Jesus says to you, "Arise."

Arise. "For just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned – if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Listen to this truth, and believe. Exclaim with the widow of Zarephath as she exclaimed about Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." Say to Jesus, "Now I know that you are God himself, and the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." Amen.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.