

Luke 7:11-17

¹¹Soon afterwards he [Jesus] went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. ¹²As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. ¹³When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" ¹⁷This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Luke 7:11-17, 2016

This week I want to continue on the theme I raised in last week's gospel message,

which was from the first 10 verses of chapter 7, immediately preceding our gospel reading for today.

You may remember I went back to Chapter 6:47, where Jesus, as He wrapped up his Sermon on the Plain, said,

“I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them.”

He had described what His followers are like in His sermon and now was going off to show the people what he was talking about.

Last week showed us that the one He describes is like the one who heals and gives life to another who is dying.

I lifted up the life of Mel Krum as a contemporary example of one of Jesus followers.

I also lifted up how our efforts and work here as God's people in this community have, and are called to continue to heal and give life.

This week Jesus shows us yet another way to live this life of discipleship.

His disciples and the crowd are still with Him as He moves on to the town called Nain where he brings a young man back to life.

But this is not just a display to show the right thing to do,
nor is it simply a display of His power.

This miracle starts somewhere else.

It has its origin in Jesus' compassion for the widow who
has lost her only son and is taking him out of the town for
burial.

His heart goes out to her

and I might add not to the son who has died.

This is about the widow.

Widows were a special concern in both the Old and New
Testament because they were often among the poor, oppressed
and abused in society.

Jewish law commanded that they be cared for and there is
evidence that in New Testament times there may have been an
organized movement in the Christian Church to care and provide
for them,

and they would have specific duties in the church and
community to include leadership roles

There is an understanding of several passages of scripture when
taken together lead some to conclude that there was an Order of
Widows, although this "Order" is never mentioned in the
scriptures.

BUT still, life could be quite tenuous for a woman left with no husband, father, or son.

Jesus knew this and His compassion for this woman moved him to place his hand on the bier and command,

“Young man I say to you, rise!”

This is not the only story of Jesus showing or talking about compassion.

The next gospel story where we hear about this compassion is the feeling the Good Samaritan has for the beat-up man on the side of the road in chapter 10, verse 33.

Then it is used to describe the feeling of the father when he sees his prodigal son return home in 15:20.

In both cases, the character in the story with those feelings acted contrary to expectations.

The Samaritan helps the injured Jew.

The father goes running, an improper act for a man, to his now-found son.

Jesus delays the tired, worn-out entourage following him to help this widow -- something she didn't even ask for.

Jesus might have been able to say,

“One who comes to me, hears my words and acts on them is one who has compassion for others and gives life.”

Think of the good that can come out of a little compassion for someone else.

In our story today a little compassion frees a widow from a possible life of poverty, ridicule and abuse, and yes the restoration of life for a young man.

In that Sermon on the Plain I spoke of a minute ago Jesus said this.

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

At the beginning of our story was a woman who wept over the death of her son.

Can you imagine what she did when her son sat up and spoke to her again?

Did she ever laugh, with joy, relief, with her son in her arms.

He sat up and began to speak.

Can you imagine what he may have been saying,
who he was speaking to?

Compassion is the inner emotion or sympathy that motivates one to action, to help others, to give life, hope and joy.

As I think about it, it occurs to me that compassion changes ones entire outlook on the other person, the community and even the world.

Compassion sets you free to open your heart to the other.

Compassion drives you to care for others and it really doesn't take much

I remember years ago when Laura and I lived in Atlanta one of our neighbors a couple of doors down was diagnosed with cancer, and by the time of the diagnosis it was to late and there was no treatment option for him.

Johnny, I believe his name was.

I went down to visit and play cards with him a couple of times.

After his funeral his wife told me how much it meant to him that I had done that.

I was surprised because I didn't think I had really done anything. It sure didn't cost me anything.

I learned then how little it takes to show someone some compassion and make their life better.

I don't know if you recall this or not but "Caring" is the way in which we define one of our core ministries.

We have defined our Mission in four core areas:

Youth and family

Worship

Care Ministry

Growth

When I meet with new members like I did last Saturday I have this Power Point Presentation I put them through.

A part of that briefly describes what we do here in our Care Ministry.

The activities I have listed there are our

- Lay Eucharistic Ministry,
- our Social Ministry that reaches the needy in our community, many of whom are in desperate situations,
- Youth Caring for Community through the service projects they take on,
- and the men's group's Partnership with City Parks in the care of the park next door, a little piece of God's creation.

but there are others.

Making a sleeping mat out of plastic grocery bags for the homeless to sleep on and donating socks are ways to care for others.

Our Weekday Childhood Ministry is a compassion ministry of this church providing care for children in our community,

many of whom would never know Jesus if they were not here.

We serve those who have losses in their lives like the death of a son, or other family member.

Jesus said,

“I will show you what someone is like who comes to me,
hears my words, and acts on them.”

And He shows us that His followers have compassion for others,
open their hearts to others,

and that compassion makes action possible.

Jesus was compassionate with this widow in our gospel story
today. His heart went out to her.

He shows us what a compassionate God we have;

one who knows our suffering in the losses of life because
He lost His own son to death.

one who abides with us in our losses, our suffering,

one who calls us to abide with others in theirs.

Amen