

## **A Certain Future**

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 7:11-17

On a brisk, May morning in the Village of Dimondale, MI I waited with great excitement at the corner of Bridge and Jefferson. I waited along with my Dad and my brothers for the Memorial Day parade to pass by our spot. Growing up in a very small town, this parade and the ensuing day's events was much anticipated by all. It was a rather small parade, modest in comparison to parades in much larger towns or cities. It started in the parking lot of Carl's Supermarket, the village grocery store, and involved typical parade participants—fire trucks, fancy cars, marching bands, and children riding their bicycles and tricycles, decorated for the occasion. The parade traveled the distance of about a mile and a quarter. In my experiences of parades, this one was standard in every way with the exception of one detail. It ended in the Village cemetery on the outskirts of town. It was a parade of joy, celebration, and excitement that ended in sadness, sorrow, and tears.

In our text we read about two parades of sorts. It might be more appropriate to call them processions. The first procession is led by Jesus. It includes the disciples and a great crowd of followers (7:11). This procession is a lot like the beginning of the Village of Dimondale's Memorial Day Parade. It is full of joy. Since Jesus is the point-man of this procession we would say this parade also represents life, hope, and a certain future. Throughout his Ministry Jesus says of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6) and "whoever believes in [me] does not perish but has eternal life" (Jn 3:16). St. Paul says of Jesus, "On him we have set our hope" (2 Cor 1:10) and he is "the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

He is God himself who has come to bring to life a creation that is dying and decaying through the effects of Sin and disobedience toward God. Last week we heard about Jesus healing a Roman Centurion's servant with just a word (Lk 7:10)—"Be healed!" At other times in his Ministry Jesus drove out demons from those who were possessed by the authority of Satan (Lk 4:31-37). He made a man who could not walk to "Rise and walk" (Lk 5:23-26). With a word he stilled a violent storm (Lk 8:22-25). In our Gospel reading Jesus, with his disciples and a crowd of followers, walks into this small, Galilean town called Nain and he brings joy, life, hope, and a certain future.

We hear in our Gospel reading about another procession that was heading through this small town of Nain on that same day. This second procession is led by a casket. It was a funeral procession and a great crowd was involved. This procession is a lot like the end of the Village of Dimondale's Memorial Day Parade. The procession was likely headed to a burial site on the outskirts of the town. This procession was full of things opposite that first one in our Gospel reading, the one led by Jesus. Instead of joy there was sadness. Instead of life there was death. Instead of hope there was hopelessness. Instead of a certain future there was nothing but uncertainty.

You see, inside this casket was a young boy, the only son of his mother who was a widow. The social custom during New Testament times was for the husband and father to care for the family and provide for them into the future. If the husband died then this responsibility went to the oldest son. And if the oldest son died then the responsibility moved on down the family line. This woman in this small Galilean town of Nain is a widow who has now lost her only son. According to the prevailing custom she had no one to care and provide for her. So here she is following in a funeral

procession while her only son is next to her lifeless and lying in a casket. And in addition to all of the feelings that a mother has to be feeling at the loss of her son, especially her only son, this widow must be thinking about the fact that she will face tomorrow with an empty household. There is no husband and no son to care for the family and provide for it. Without a doubt, she has an uncertain future.

I imagine that sometimes it can feel like you are walking in one of these types of processions. One minute we experience an event in our lives that brings us great joy and excitement. We find out about the new birth of a relative or the good news of a new job or promotion. Then, just as quickly, an event can happen that brings sadness and sorrow. We hear about the latest natural disaster or national tragedy and we feel for the victims and their families. Or worse yet, a disaster and tragedy hits closer to home through the death of a family member or friend! When these kinds of events occur we can feel like we are in a completely different procession. We can feel a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty about the future.

Two processions are traveling in the small town of Nain. The first procession is led by Jesus. It is a procession that travels through a life filled with sorrow, sadness, and suffering but Jesus leads the people through it with the reality of joy, life, hope, and a certain future. The second procession is led by a casket. It is a procession that seems to have nothing to look forward to but the same fate of the young man who lies down lifeless in a wooden box leading the way. It is a procession with a profound sense of hopelessness and an uncertain future. And then all of a sudden something remarkable happens. The two processions collide. Similar to that Memorial Day Parade in the Village of Dimondale, two very different processions with two very different moods and tones seem to come together.

Now, I will admit the collision is a little subtle. But as Jesus and his procession draws near the gate of the town of Nain he sees this funeral procession. The casket was being carried out of the town and the young boy in it was going to be placed in his final resting place. When Jesus sees this husband-less and mother-less woman walking next to the casket carrying her son, he interrupts the whole thing. With a word and a single touch Jesus brings life where there was once death. Hope where there was once sadness, sorrow, and despair. A certain future where there was once uncertainty. In short, he makes one hope-filled procession! With a word of compassion to a hurting, broken, sorrow-filled woman and a touch on the casket carrying a dead, lifeless boy, Jesus changes everything.

This is simply what Jesus does. He is God in the flesh who has come to collide with people's lives to bring certainty out of uncertainty, life out of death, and hope out of despair. As we live in this world there will be these two types of processions. This world offers no hope and no certain future. There will always be this kind of philosophy that says that *this* life is all we have and the grave is all we have to look forward to. But there is also a heavenly procession. God has come in the person of Jesus to reign in this world. He has come to fix what is broken, to bring life where there was once death, to bring hope where it was once lacking. Through all of this he brings a certain future where there was once uncertainty.

When Jesus touched the casket of the young man and told him to rise, the young man sat up and began to speak and Jesus then gave him back to his mother. With a word and a touch Jesus brought life and restored a broken relationship. Upon observing this, the response of the people was, "A great prophet has arisen among us" (7:16)! The price of Sin is

suffering, sorrow, despair, and death. Through his procession on Good Friday, carrying the cross to Golgotha, Jesus has paid the price of Sin. Through his resurrection, this great prophet rises among the people to bring a procession and a parade of resurrection life. He comes to bring life, hope, and a certain future not just for widows but for all people.

He comes to collide with your life through a word of compassion and a personal touch. In the waters of Holy Baptism God came with words to claim you as his very own and put his name upon you. Through the touch of water he gave you the sure and certain promise of life forever in his name. You rise from the waters of your Baptism alive and God brings you into his heavenly procession full of hope and certain future.

When Jesus brought this young man to life the people said, “A great prophet has arisen among us” (Lk 7:16). They also said this, “God has visited his people” (Lk 7:16). And after the people spoke this word they joined Jesus’ procession and they went throughout the surrounding country touching the lives of others and spreading the good news—life, hope, and a certain future. God has and continues to visit his people. Amen.