



THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOR

SABBATH SURVIVAL KIT



SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 2007

From all appearances the young man from Nain was dead. The funeral procession moves along until Jesus stops it with a word - "Do not weep" - and a touch. Another word, "I say to you, rise!" and the dead man is restored to life; another touch and he is restored to his community. Jesus' powerful word and healing touch are for us, too, for God has looked favorably on we who are God's people.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Compassionate God, you have assured the human family of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Deliver us from death of sin, and raise us to new life in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

FIRST LESSON - 1 KINGS 17:17-24

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "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!" But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again." The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

+ HOLY GOSPEL - LUKE 7:11-17

Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As 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. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

REFLECTION "THE GOSPEL OPENS YOUR FUTURE" LUKE 7:11-17 PASTOR WAYNE ZSCHECH

"And Jesus said, 'Young man, I say to you, rise!' And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."

Lutherans are known for being Christians who focus on the distinction between law and gospel. The law shows us our sin. The gospel frees us from it. The law points to death and the gospel proclaims new life on the other side of it. The law is God's judgment and the gospel is God's unconditional and loving grace of forgiveness. The law afflicts the comfortable while the gospel comforts the afflicted. Or, as a colleague of mine once said, "The law closes our future but the gospel opens it."

You don't have to look far in either the reading from 1 Kings or the gospel according to Luke to discover the law in the story. The law is the death of a widow's son. Whether it is the widow of Zarepheth or the widow of Nain, both of these women are facing a life with a closed future upon the death of their son. Without a son, both of these women's futures were closed; not open.

Why? Because in ancient Israel a woman's ability to provide for herself was dependent on the man of the house. Widows had no real means of earning a living. The household economy revolved around either the husband or the son's ability to earn a living and provide for the family. As widows, both of these women had their primary source of economic security gone. They were already dependent on the mercy of family and neighbors simply to survive.

However, one day their sons would be old enough to earn a living and would care for them. Their future had hope, and that hope rest in the life of their sons. But with her son dead, each widow faced a future without hope and without promise. Like the son for whom each grieved, their life as dead. That's the law.

What are the times when we have come face to face with the law? When have we experienced “death” in one form or another and couldn’t even imagine what our future might be. Certainly the death of a spouse or child can cause such feelings and a sense of hopelessness and meaningless future. But the loss of a job, or the inability to find a new one soon afterward can also create that same sense of despair that comes with death.

For a teenager the flunking of a test, the rejection of friends or a potential prom date, getting cut from the team of a sport you love to play, or even getting suspended, or worse, arrested, are all “little deaths” as Martin Luther used to say. Looking back we may not see them as being all that tragic. But these situations of life are so dark in and seemingly hopeless in their eyes they literally see no future.

For the person who is retired and whose body or mind are no longer able to keep them active in the manner in which they were accustomed I would imagine they would experience a “little death” as well. What would they do now that they were incapable of functioning at the level that had met that need for so long?

I’ll never forget sitting in Dot Cunningham’s room one day a few months before she died and the look of utter sadness on her face as she held her head to one side with her hand. “I used to do so much in the church. Now I can’t do anything,” she said with the most sorrowful voice she could muster. At 97 she had been a faithful servant for many years, teaching Sunday School as well as release time school during the week back when schools were obligated to not schedule activities one day during the week so students could attend education classes at their place of worship. She sewed quilts for Lutheran World Relief and when she couldn’t quilt she at least sewed the pieces together for others to quilt. She was even the first woman to serve on the congregation council. And at 97 with her body slowly giving out she wondered what her future held.

Jesus sees the funeral procession heading out of town and he has compassion. That’s not exactly accurate. Jesus had a gut-wrenching reaction to seeing the funeral for a widow’s only son. She doesn’t go to him. It’s Jesus who goes to her and stops the entire procession. He lays his hand on the bier or pallet on which the dead son lay and said, “Young man, I say to you rise!” And he sat up and began to speak. The breath of life was back in him. And then Jesus gave him to his mother. More than just giving her back her son, Jesus gave her back a future that promised life rather than death.

That’s the good news in this story. That’s the gospel that opens the future rather than the law that closes it. That’s the resurrection moment in this story, as well as in the story of the widow of Zarepheth whom Elijah brought back after stretching out over him three times. In the midst of experiencing the darkness of death and the lack of a future that comes from experiencing the law, God in Christ offers new life and a future through the gospel of Christ’s resurrection.

Is this what you trust in when you experience a “little death” in your life? We have been baptized into both the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That means no matter how dismal, bleak, or dark our future may look as a result of a death or death-like experience, it is never so dismal, dark or bleak that the God of the resurrection cannot provide an Easter experience and open our future once again.

It may not look like the new life you or I envisioned for ourselves. It certainly will not be our old life back again. We don’t experience death in our lives without it changing us in a way where life will ever be like it once was. The God who loves us with compassion “from the gut” is the God who gives us new hope, new life, and a new future that is shaped by the death we experienced, but not conquered by it.

Think about the times you’ve experienced a “little death” in your life. How has your faith in the promise of the resurrection sustained you when you felt like you had no real future? How has God opened your future rather than closed it with an Easter experience of the resurrection gospel and the new life it promises? Who has God chosen to come near to you in those times to be his agents of grace, and when has God given you the opportunity to be the same for others who feel like their future has been closed and filled with darkness?

The law closes our future, but thanks be to the God who has raised Christ that gospel opens our future to a new life transformed by God. May this promise and hope be that which sustains you and I as we travel together in our journey of faith as a community in Christ.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. God of grace, we give thanks for your Son’s presence among us even before the created world. Bless us by your Spirit that we may come to know you more fully. God of all creation, we give you thanks for giving us dominion over the works of your hands. Guide us in faithfully caring for all creatures, that we might rightfully serve their needs. God of majesty, comfort all those affected by widespread illness and disease. God of mercy, bless your servants who continually bear witness even in their suffering and grant hope to those who live in hopelessness. Comfort all the sick, that all may have peace.

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

BLESSING

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. May you be rooted and grounded in his love. Amen.