

Joy out of Sadness  
Luke 7:11-17

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

You are in a procession. You and You and You, each of you is in the Procession. You don't have a choice in the matter. You weren't asked if you wanted to take part. You weren't free to go another way. No we are all in the procession that is leaving. We are all in that procession leaving the town of Nain. We are all heading to the cemetery and to death.

That sounds kind of morbid doesn't it? We usually don't like to hear or talk about that "death" thing especially on such a fine Summer morning. But the reality is that it's where we all are headed. Death is a juggernaut, a force so great that nothing can stand up to it, it will rollover and crush anything in it's' way. Such a force and power is scary, worrisome, and many people refuse to even talk about their own eventual deaths because it scares them. It's a power we can't control or stop, that one day like a bulldozer, like a great juggernaut it will come rolling up right before us ready to run us over.

I would imagine almost all of us here have been a part of a funeral procession. Perhaps it was for a co-worker, a friend, a neighbor, perhaps it was a little closer and we followed a little closer since it was a spouse, a child, a parent. Perhaps it was right here in the church. The service is held commending the person into God's Care, and then the pastor leads the pall bearers out the door with the family trailing behind, as we head off to the cemetery. Since the time before Christ that is how the funeral procession worked except with a few differences. In Christ's time the body would not be prepped for times of visitation, bodies just didn't sit well. So within 24 hours of a person dying the service would be held, or as soon as the body was prepared. A dead body first had to be cleansed and anointed with spices and ointments. Then strips of cloth would be wrapped around the individual, wrapping them up tight. Then the body would be laid on a stretcher or funeral bier and a light white shroud would be laid over the entire thing kind of like a funeral pall cloth of today over a casket.

Then there would be a funeral procession to the grave. The procession would begin at the home, than wound through the village streets to the cemetery outside the wall of the town. The family would follow the pall bearers who carried the body on the wooden stretcher. If the family could afford it they would have professional mourners. (Imagine that, people that got paid to wail and cry loudly for a living). People believed that the bigger the commotion

the bigger the honor and sign of importance for the person who had died. It was perfectly acceptable to wail and mourn and cry as loud as possible back then. Now we stifle it and try to keep tough upper lip. But not then, no the louder the better, the more noise would bring about more people coming to follow and take part. The procession would go through the streets slowly growing in size and by the time it reached the city gate it would be a large crowd.

This tradition is just like the juggernaut of death we were talking about earlier. The procession went along, scooping up more and more people until everyone was involved. Death rolls along through the world, scooping up more and more people as it travels through our world over time. And it's still rolling. Not a single one of us can escape that juggernaut. It's only a matter of time before it rolls over each one of us.

In chapter seven, Luke sets the stage with this force that just keeps rolling along. But then he sets about the collision, when he says "Jesus along with his disciples and a great crowd happened to be also going towards that gate of the city in the opposite direction. Right there by city gate, Jesus and his crowd of followers collide with the dead and its crowd of followers. One side would have to give for the other to pass by. The city gates were not big enough for both great large groups to pass by next to each other. No there was no way around it there was a collision of two groups there. Death and Christ.

Luke even heightens the drama by reminding us that Jesus is Lord. He uses Jesus a lot, or even the pronoun He, but in this place he mentions the title of Jesus, "The Lord" saw her and he had compassion. Jesus the Lord of Life and death, the one who holds sway over light and darkness. The Lord saw the sadness of death and had compassion.

Jesus had compassion on this widow. Her husband had already died, she had walked this way once before at least for a close family member, her husband. But then she still had her Son to give her strength and hope. Now she walks out of the city with no husband and no son, going to bury her only son. Imagine her suffering and grief. The Social Security system of the ancient world was a large family, No Government handouts, family was responsible for their own – One generation taking care of the next and so on and so on. Children depended on parents to raise them, parents depended on children to care for them in the waning years. Widows without children were reduced to begging, life on the streets, homeless and victimized. And Jesus knew all this and had compassion on this woman.

His heart goes out to this woman and he confronts the funeral procession. Luke describes the collision of this juggernaut of death and the one who has power of life and death. Now if a funeral procession was coming by it was custom for other travelers to make

way for it to pass by. Still today we give this allowance, when cars in a funeral procession go through intersections and red-lights without stopping. We allow out of respect for the dead, the right of the passage of this procession. But Jesus doesn't do what is expected. I am sure his disciples and crowds were flabbergasted when Jesus looked to the widow and told her "Do not weep". Coming from anybody else this would sound cruel. Imagine going to a funeral and commanding a grieving spouse not to cry. But Jesus says it as a command, Do NOT Weep. Because he knows there is life, he calls on faith and hope to override the need for tears and sadness.

Then what Jesus does next really would have shocked the crowd. He walked over to the dead body and touched it. One of the most offensive and most unclean jobs ritually speaking in the Jewish culture was preparing dead bodies for burial. If you could avoid touching a dead body it was your duty to do that. Avoid touching at all costs. And the word used here for what Jesus did goes beyond just touching. Literally translated it could read that he grabbed it, took hold of it, he seized it. That brings totally different images to mind. Remember this is a collision of life and death. One going out to the grave and one coming into the life of the people. Jesus grabs hold, seizes the funeral litter and commands life. He says "Young man, I say to you, rise"

Jesus addressed the dead man himself, just like he will soon in the scripture to Lazarus and eventually to each of us in our time. Jesus will grab hold of us and call us forth from the dead – calling us to life anew. And Luke points this out again by telling us that the "dead man", not the young man, not the widow's son, not even the one that was dead, but the "dead man sat up and began to speak." The one dead, is now alive.

This story of Christ defeating death, the steam rolling juggernaut that overtakes and is a part of all our futures, is stopped and shows us the ultimate victory. This very day we are all caught up in the same juggernaut of death. Its' going to bulldozer over us and knock us down and pull us in. there's no way we're going to be able to stop it. One day we will be carried out by pallbearers, there will be a procession for us. There will be mourners and sadness. But this scripture assures us that in that day, when we are being carried away by death, in that day, Jesus Christ, the Lord, will meet our funeral procession head on. He will touch our us, no he will do more than that, he will seize us and take hold of us, grasping us and never letting go. He will seize us once and for all times, and he will say to each one of us, I say arise. And thanks be to God we know that we shall. We will arise into that new life, that Jesus has won over death.

Let us give thanks this day that we have a Lord, a hope, a promise that stands over life and death, a promise that we will be a part of that heavenly kingdom forever. Hear the words of God's compassion. Hear the word of that powerful collision of life over death and be filled with hope. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.  
AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, you have granted us the assurance of your son, who overcomes all death and sorrows, to win for us a joy in your everlasting kingdom. Continue to be with us and grant us the peace to praise your name for that great gift this day. Empower us to worship and honor you in all your glory.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you bless us with the mind of service, to be like the sacrificial lamb who gave of himself so all might have life. Allow us to follow in his footsteps, to overcome hatred, and division, to seek your path of service and discipleship. Allow us to come to your waters of baptism and your table of Holy Communion and leave renewed and energized for your work in this community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, send your comforting spirit to descend upon this world and guide nations and leaders to come to understand and know of your ways of peace. Hold this world in your ever caring hands Lord, and mend broken hearts, overcome hardships of disasters and diseases. Lord grant comfort to those in mourning so they may see the light of your everlasting kingdom. Grant your spirit of healing to those who are torn down by sickness, or troubled by despair, be with all those who are alone, forgotten, homebound and be with all those we lift up in our prayers to you now....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for your church, and our communities. Guide us this day as your witnesses, teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the up building of your body of faith, to worship you and to go forth as your servants to our community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.