

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Luke 7:11-17
September 16th, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

A Great Prophet Has Risen

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

Our Lord came into this world to lay down His life as a sacrifice. But He seems to get distracted, almost impatient, along the way. Consider the widow in Nain. Our Lord knows the boy will be raised on the Last Day and the widow's grief will come to an end. But when He sees her sorrow, perhaps thinking also of His own mother, He is moved by compassion. He acts right then. It is the same with all His miracles. None of them are planned. All of them are spontaneous. All of them, even the withering of the fig tree, come from Our Lord's compassion and serve to re-order creation.

The miracle in Nain fills the people with fear. Then, immediately, they glorify God. Our Lord's compassion should scare us, because it is holy, pure, and focused. It is hard for sinners, at first glance, to distinguish it from His wrath. It is more absolute, more solid, more unbending than anything of Earth. Nothing of the Lord is cotton balls and marshmallows. Even His mercy is severe.

The people were terrified as our Lord touched the casket and spoke to the boy. Perhaps He would destroy the boy or destroy all of them. And when the boy rises, it is scarcely better. They are even more afraid. If He has the power to give life, He has the power to take life. They want to know what this means. Will He now kill the boy? Will He now kill us? Surely He sees how even as we were carrying the casket to the grave we were thinking of how we looked, what people thought of us, or even given to perverted daydreams and thoughts. Surely, our selfishness, our pride, was evident and disgusting to Him Who is holy.

We have often watered down the "fear of the Lord," as found in God's holy Word, so that it meant little more than "respect" or "awe." But we should fear God's wrath and because of that do nothing against His commandments. This does not mean simply that we should respect His wrath. It means we should fear His threats of punishment, knowing that we deserve them and that they are terrible and eternal. When we consider how we have broken the Commandments, how we have gossiped, lusted, lied, cursed, been envious, and so forth, we should be afraid. We do not only receive spiritual mercy, in that we do not pay for our sins in Hell; but we also receive a great deal of temporal mercy. We get away with most of our sins. We gossip about our best friends and do not always get caught. Or we enjoy the grace and forgiveness of friends who put up with us despite the fact that we have betrayed them. How many times have we been told something "in strictest confidence," only to repeat it in the same? None of us could afford to pay the fines for all our traffic violations for which we do not get

caught. None of us could look our wives in the eyes if they could read our thoughts about other women. Indeed, none of us could remain in holy marriage without constant grace from Heaven, and also from our spouses. Such thoughts ought to fill us with gratitude. But they also ought to give us some fear, for we ought to see how close we have stood to the edge, how we have played with fire, dangled our toes in shark-infested waters, and how just the wrath of God is and how terrible.

C.S. Lewis beautifully depicts the fear of the Lord in his novel, *The Horse and His Boy*. Early in the story the horses are being stalked by a pride of lions. They catch glimpses of these lions, smell them, and hear occasional roars as the lions call back and forth to one another. They are filled with terror at the thought of being ripped open and devoured by these fearsome lions. Their way is blocked and they have to turn around, or go racing off at full speed to get away. At the end of the novel, the horses learn that it was only one lion, Aslan, the Christ-figure, and that He guided them by this fear.

Our Lord and His angels are forever telling those whom they encounter to not be afraid. In the first place, this means they were afraid. He is not making up abstract possibilities. "Do not be hungry." "Do not be given to *Schadenfreude*," that is, the malicious enjoyment in other peoples' misfortune. "Do not stare at the sun." They are truly afraid. He is holy. He is powerful. He might punish and kill them. When He says, "Do not be afraid," He means, "I am not going to kill you. I am here in mercy, to love you, cleanse you, and accept you."

The comfort our Lord gives is for those who are afraid; who feel their sins. Because, even though our Lord tells His disciples to not be afraid, the fear they knew was not contrary to our Lord's word and will. He does not say, "You are wrong to be afraid. I would never hurt you." He does not say, "Why would you be afraid of Me?" as though such fear were preposterous or strange. He knows why they are afraid. They are right to be afraid. I say again: they are right to be afraid. But He has not come to judge them or kill them. He has come to lay down His life for them in order to forgive and free them. So He says, "Stop being afraid."

Something is askew in us if we mistake our Lord's mercy as weakness, or His grace for complacency. Aslan does not apologize for scaring the horses. But he did it without malice. He did it for their own good, to get them on the right path, where they needed to be.

We have taken the Lord's mercy for granted. We have bent His Word and Law to fit our own agendas, to meet the expectations of our culture. We have not been afraid of God's wrath, but acted like spoiled children. We have been more afraid of what the world thought of us, rather than what God's wrath will do to us. Consider the power of God and His perfection.

And then, stop being afraid. Rejoice that He comes in peace, with mercy and healing, that He is moved by compassion. His ways are not our ways. He has not interrupted any of our funeral processions, or any others that I know of, since the one in Nain. We bury our dead and we wait, in faith, for the resurrection to come. Be not deaf to the roars of the Law, to its threats, for we should fear God's wrath. Death is the wages of sin and is extracted from us on a daily basis. But so also know that the Lord moves, even when it is according to His Law, in compassion. His miracles seem almost impatient for the Last Day, eager from the good work He has begun in us to be complete, for the reconciled creation to be restored. But if He is impatient for that, He is not impatient with you. He put up with the Apostles and the saints. He puts up no less with you.

The Lord's Body and Blood, bodily present, and given to us in bread and wine, certainly does fill us with fear if we contemplate it. Let us contemplate it. And let us know something of this fear for that is the meaning of reverence. Let us recognize the power of God in this miracle, that He comes to us in His Body and Blood. He is here with us, right now, in His Word and Sacraments. He is present among us. Recognize that and be afraid of His wrath for our sins, but also believe in and rejoice in His mercy

for us and also for the grace He has shown us. He has come to us to show compassion for us who are dead in our trespasses and sins. And so also, like the people of Nain, let us glorify God for this miraculous mercy; Let us rejoice in His grace. For the Lord is not here to kill you or judge you or humiliate you. He is here to give His life to you, for you. He is here to raise you and those you love, to seal you in the resurrection to come. For, surely God has visited His people in the flesh of His people, so that we might have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation in Him alone. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!