

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“Never Alone”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

As He drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow...And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her. Luke 7:12, 13

“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” (Psalm 8:4). What are people, human beings, that the LORD, our Lord, Maker of heaven and earth, pays *any* attention to us, much less crowns us with glory and honor and gives us dominion over the works of His hands? We are so small, so seemingly insignificant in the grand scheme of things, that it seems unlikely, to say the least, that God would concern Himself with us and with our troubles. He’s got a whole *universe* to run, doesn’t He? And who are we? Weak, finite creatures who spend much of our time running *away* from Him! We are people with problems and mixed up priorities; *He* is holy and perfect. What gives?

In the passage immediately *preceding* our text this morning, Luke records that while Jesus was in the city of Capernaum, a centurion, a Roman soldier, sent some messengers to Him, asking Him to come and heal one of his servants, who was sick and at the point of death. Thinking He would need some convincing, they tell Jesus all about the centurion, how he is “worthy to have You do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” So He goes with them. But as He is approaching the house, the centurion sends word, saying, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for *I am not worthy* to have you come under my roof.” He acknowledges Jesus’ authority, inviting Him to merely “say the word,” and let his servant be healed. This man *knew* that he was not worthy to ask this of the Lord, in spite of what the others had said, but Jesus, the fullness of God in human flesh, had mercy on him anyway and healed his servant.

Even *more* amazing, though, is Jesus’ response in today’s reading. The situation is worse in almost every way. Whereas Jesus had been invited by the centurion to come and heal his servant, here He just sort of *happens* upon this funeral procession for a young man, whose sickness has *already* led to death. We’re told this young man was not a servant, but the only son of his mother, *and* she was a widow. In other words, she was now completely *alone*. Without a husband or a son to take care of her and to provide for her, this woman would lose everything. She would be an outcast in society. *No* one that day was singing her praises.

And yet, we read that when Jesus saw her, He had *compassion* on her. He *felt* for her, as we are also meant to from this description of her unfortunate and difficult circumstances. We know from Genesis 2 that it is not *good* for man to be alone (verse 18). Among the animals, no helper was found fit for Adam, and so, God made a *woman*, a fellow human being, and brought her to him, causing him to cry out, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (verse 23). In today’s Old Testament reading, God uses the prophet Elijah to restore a poor widow’s son back to life, that *she* might not be alone (1 Kings 17:17-24). And from the cross, Christ Himself makes sure that his own mother is taken care of by giving her to the apostle John (John 19:27). It is not good that man should be alone. We were *made* for community. So, what is this woman that the Lord is mindful of her? She is *alone*, and that’s not the way it’s supposed to be.

Of course, you don’t have to be a widow to be alone. All you have to be is living in a sinful world. Even the most introverted among us don’t want to be alone, at least not all the time. We *all* need help and support, friendship and encouragement. We need *others*. And others need *us*. That’s how God’s designed us to work. But sin has thrown such a wrench in the gears that we can find ourselves *feeling* alone, even when we’re *surrounded* by other people. Maybe it’s guilt: we don’t want others to find out who we really are and what we’ve done. Maybe it’s pride: we don’t want to appear weak, and so we *reject* others’ help. Maybe it’s those who have sinned against *us*, so that we no longer *want* anyone’s help, or trust it.

But it’s *dangerous* to go alone. The image of the devil as a hungry lion from Peter’s first epistle is a familiar one (1 Peter 5:8). But think about *how* lions hunt: they don’t go for the herd; they go for the *loners*, the stragglers, the ones they can get *alone*. It’s the same with our adversary, the devil. He is seeking someone to devour, and though we all have targets on our backs from the moment we’re baptized, it’s the loners who get picked off the easiest.

And that’s why God, who made us *for* community, has also placed us *in* community. When God in His Word speaks of His people, the Church, He uses images like a body, a family, and a building; but what these all have in common is that they are pieces, or parts, coming together to make a *whole*. Like a herd of elephants forming a protective circle around their young, we are *stronger* together, not because *we* are strong, but because our strength comes from the *Lord*, who is the Head of His Body, the Church, the One by whose Spirit we cry, “Abba! Father!” and our Cornerstone. Together, we hear the forgiveness of sins proclaimed to us by pastors who speak in Christ’s stead and by His command; we receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar; we make music that “drives out the devil,” as Martin Luther once

famously said; we pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus, trusting in His mercy; and we resist the devil, firm in our faith.

So is it any wonder that Jesus, full of compassion, stops the procession, raises the young man from the dead, and gives him to his mother, so that she will no longer be alone? That's the *main* miracle, here: not the raising of a widow's son, but the restoring of an outcast to acceptance. We don't even know if this woman had faith! But Jesus was mindful of her anyway. He showed His compassion for sinners by making sure that this poor widow was cared for.

And as sinners living in a sinful world, we find *ourselves* in a similarly unfortunate and difficult situation: we are outcasts, separated from God by the sin that we have inherited from Adam. We need *help*. But from where? Who can help us? "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life" (Ps. 49:7). We certainly cannot free *ourselves* from our sinful condition. It's like we're in this long funeral march headed for the inevitable.

But then, who should come across our path but Jesus, who sees us and has compassion on us, not because we are worthy, but because we are *alone*, and that's not the way it's supposed to be. So, He stops the procession. He touches the casket. He gets His hands *dirty* with death. And while He becomes sin who knew no sin, we become the righteousness of God. Christ, the only Son of His Father, *dies* in order that we might live. He says to you in your Baptism, "Young man, young woman, I say to you, arise," and you are raised to newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Your sins are forgiven, and He gives you to God, no longer an outcast, but *accepted* through the blood of His cross.

And now, you are *never* alone, for He has said, "I am with you *always*" (Matt. 28:20). "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). Christ, our risen and ascended Lord, will come again with the clouds on the Last Day, and He will raise us from the dead *physically* and wipe away every tear from our eyes. For "the dwelling place of God is with man" (Rev. 21:3).

Let us, then, respond to this good news as the crowds did: with great *fear*. They glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited His people!" These things are most certainly true. Jesus *is* a great prophet, who still speaks to us today by His Word. He visits us each and every time we open a Bible or come to church or go to Bible study. Which means that when we *neglect* these things, when we do *not* hold His Word sacred, and gladly hear and learn it, we reject the one thing needful, replacing God and His Word with some *alternate* source of care and protection. But He alone is the one true God, and His Word is truth, more than happiness or grades

or family or success. “I’m the One who can help you,” God says, “Cling to *Me*, and you will never be alone.”

It’s dangerous to go alone. It’s not supposed to be that way. But you are God’s: He has made you and redeemed you. He *is* holy and perfect, but in Christ, now, so are you. You may be small and seemingly insignificant in the grand scheme of things, but only seemingly. In fact, this world was *made* for you, God sent His Son to *die* for you, and He’s given You His Holy Spirit as a *guarantee* of your future life together with Him and all saints (Eph. 1:14). That’s why the Lord is mindful of you: you’re His own child. He cares for you. He is *merciful*, and behold, He is with you always.

In ☩ Jesus’ name. Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you ever wondered why God cares for you?
2. Why is it not good for man to be alone?
3. How has Jesus had compassion on sinners?
4. What does it mean to fear God?