

# Showdown

Bible Reading: Luke 7:11-17

Message: Luke 7:12, "Showdown at the gates of Nain"

Our passage begins with the words, "Soon afterward". Our story is connected to the previous one. Something amazing had happened in Capernaum. Jesus had healed the servant of a centurion without even seeing him. Everyone was amazed at the power of Jesus. The Centurion was amazed too – not at Jesus' power for he expected Jesus to have that power. Rather, he was amazed at God's kindness toward him. And Jesus was amazed at the Centurion's faith.

So everyone is amazed and Jesus is at the centre of it. A company travels from Capernaum, spell-bound by Jesus. They are on their way to Nain – a town about 35 kms away. Jesus is accompanied not just by his disciples but by a great crowd. It's a bit like a carnival. They are looking forward to hearing more of Jesus' teachings (like in chapter 6) and seeing more of Jesus' miracles (like in chapter 7). They are excited to be with Jesus for it feels like they are on the winning side.

They draw near to the city, their way is blocked. There appeared the enemy, death. Verse 12: behold a man who had died was being carried out. This was a particularly evil death. He was the only son of his mother and she was a widow. The town was moved with pity for her and came out in a great crowd to support her as she goes to bury her son. Not only did she have to deal with the grief at losing her husband and now her son, but the demons of loneliness and poverty now pursued her.

This is what blocked their entry to the village of Nain.

Death always trumps life. If you want to celebrate a birthday, but someone in the family dies before the party happens, then it will surely be cancelled. In fact, when a close family member dies, many things get cancelled- work, meetings, school. Life stands back in the face of death.

Jesus should do the same. If you were in that crowd with Jesus, what would you do? You would probably stand aside so that the mourners might pass by while you take off your hat and look solemn and sad. Perhaps you will think about what you might say to the woman to express some sort of hope or comfort.

It looks like death's sadness will quell life's celebration.

Verse 13: The two companies meet at the city gate and at first it seems that Jesus falls in line and does the expected thing. He goes to the widow because he has compassion on her, and he wants to say something to comfort her. But what he says is shocking. Nobody would ever say that. It seems completely unacceptable: "Do not weep", he says.

It like telling a person who is in agony to be happy without first giving him something for the pain.

Jesus is Lord. He commands and he expects to be obeyed. He expects you too to obey him, even if it might seem unreasonable or impossible. When you feel hopeless, Jesus says to you: don't give way to despair. If you believe in Jesus, you can laugh in the darkness, sing round the grave of a loved one, hope in the hospital ward and walk upright in the valley of the shadow of death.

Verse 14: see what Jesus does. He has commanded the widow to stop crying, and presumably she does. Then he goes and deals with the source of her tears. He goes from the widow to the dead son. He touched the bier and the carriers stopped.

Jesus touched the bier. Jesus is always touching things – he touched a woman, Peter’s mother in law and fever left her; he touched a leper and cleansed him; he touched the eyes of a blind man and gave him sight. Matthew says that this is a graphic symbol of how he took our sorrows and infirmities on himself. Just as he had taken another man’s blindness on himself, and another’s leprosy, and so much else – now he takes this woman’s sorrow upon himself – for by touching the bier, Jesus is about to take this man’s death upon himself.

You see, Jesus also is an only son. The grief this woman would know is what the Father would know. He would die and leave behind a father bereft of his only son. Jesus volunteers to die to relieve the sorrow of a woman whom he’d never met before. He does it simply because he has pity on her and loves her. He cannot let her tears fall when he can do something to relieve her – even if it means he must die in the place of her son.

So Jesus goes and he again does something that is unusual at a funeral. He touches the bier and speaks to the dead man. Now sometimes people do that. They might speak to the dead – “I love you” “I’ll never forget you”, or very softly so that nobody hears, “I’m so sorry. Will you please forgive me?”

But Jesus says something to the man which makes no sense unless the man responds: “Young man, I say to you, ‘Arise!’”

Jesus stressed here his own lordship: I say this to you. Because it is my voice reaching your ears, you may not ignore me. Just because you are dead is not excuse to disobey me!

Verse 15: he sat up and began to speak. And to be sure we understand what this is all about – it’s not about raising the dead, it’s about responding to the grief of the bereaved mother - Luke tells us that Jesus then goes the boy to his mother.

The crowds were in a collision course, and a showdown was in the making. Where Jesus is, the Lord of the Kingdom of God, exciting things, unexpected things happen. Death stands back and makes way for life; sorrows are crushed and joy resounds. What joy came to Nain that day!

This is what happens in the church, for where God’s people gather for worship, there is the church of Jesus Christ, and there the Lord is, speaking to his people words of comfort, and commands unto life. The people travelling with Jesus were not disappointed. They arrived at Nain, amazed at what Jesus had done, and now, against every expectation, he had amazed them even more. He restored to a grieving widow her only son.

This Jesus continues to amaze us with the gospel. Go to the rally point where Jesus is. He will amaze you too.