**Luke 7:11–17** 11Soon afterward Jesus went on his way to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd were traveling with him. 12As he was approaching the town gate, there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother. She was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. 13When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not cry.” 14He went up to the open coffin, touched it, and the pallbearers stopped. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” 15The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16Fear gripped all of them, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us” and “God has visited his people!” 17This was reported about him in all of Judea and in all the surrounding countryside.

I have to tell you that I really have no problem getting my head into what this mother was going through. She is coming out of town to bury her son, her only son and then Scripture makes sure you grasp that “she was a widow.” In other words, her son is all she had in this life. If she was a believer, she was enduring this grief the best she could, committing herself to the hand of God and holding on dearly to the promises of God that “he would be with her and help her at this time of bitterness.” If she was not a Christian, then I will tell you she is probably and simply filled with despair. I say that because her son, with the death of the father, was the one who would take care of her and administer the affairs of the household. Her son was her retirement program and now the remainder of her life was one big question mark.

I will tell you that I think she was a believer. Why? Because of the crowd from the town that was with her. It is clear this woman and her son were well loved. That large crowd of people from this town said a lot about this woman and her son. People cared about them. That happens only because this woman and her son cared about people, they displayed Godly lives. This large procession says so much about this family.

It does make me wonder about what it was that brought about the young man’s death. Do note that by the way. The Greek word used here is for that of a young man beyond the age of puberty, but unmarried at this point. We can make the guess that perhaps this young man was a teenager or even a man in his twenties. I wonder about the death because Jesus has been involved in his ministry for a number of months and surely even the people of Nain had heard the stories of his wonders and miracles. If it had been an extended illness, then why didn’t someone go and seek the help of Jesus? That’s what makes me think it was a fairly sudden death, because nobody thought to go and find Jesus. For that matter, just the day before Jesus is in a nearby town and yet no one comes to seek the help of Jesus. Yet I do want you to contemplate that Jesus, where nothing is “just coincidence,” heads for this town in order to help and bring his particular brand of joy into the lives of these people. Our theme will be: **THERE IS LIFE IN JESUS!**

As we begin looking at this text, the first thing I want to do is consider all the texts of this particular Sunday. For the most part, those who put together these readings do so because there is something that is in common with all the readings. The common link between our Old Testament history of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath’s son I think is pretty evident. In our history Jesus is also bringing to life a widow’s son. Don’t underestimate the point of God doing this. Elijah, as a prophet of God served as a “shadow” or as a “type or picture” of the Christ. In other words, what you find in parts of the life of Elijah, you are going to find in the life of Jesus.

But don’t miss that other important part of why history repeats itself in the Messiah. Did you catch the conclusion of the widow of Zarephath in regard to Elijah as a prophet? Based on just that miracle alone she concludes: **“Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is true.”** Do you see the implication of that in regard to Jesus? Our conclusion is to be the same as that widow’s: “Jesus is a man of God and his word is true!” I pray that lesson sinks in.

Where I find that people kind of struggle is figuring out how the Epistle lesson fits in. The Epistle lesson is a continuation of our reading from last week. Here is Paul emphasizing all the more that his “gospel” is not of human origin. It helps us to understand the importance of the Gospel and not changing it. Yet, what is the connection between this Epistle and the other two readings? I will let you ponder that as we turn our attention back to what our Gospel reveals.

So, here is Jesus heading into the town of Nain. The previous day, he had healed the Centurian’s servant by doing nothing more than **“say the word.”** It is a wonderful lesson on the power and majesty of Jesus. Don’t forget that Jesus was doing miracles all the time. We have records of only a few of the most awesome ones, those that really stand out. Crowds are following Jesus because of his miracles. After the miracle of Capernaum, Jesus now heads to Nain. I believe Jesus headed to Nain because He knew exactly what was going on. Jesus knew this young man had died and Jesus knew exactly what time that funeral procession would be leaving town so that His large group and that large group would meet just outside the city gates. I believe this was done so that the most people would be witnesses to the wonder and might of Jesus.

Picture what happened. The town of Nain is being approached. On the road is Jesus and his large crowd. You can see as you approach the town a crowd coming out and it is clear this is a funeral. The men carrying the funeral bier, a stretcher like apparatus, are in the front, leading the people. Following would be the widow and close friends. Behind her the crowd from town. A substantial crowd from the town is with her. What I am trying to get you to understand is that as the two crowds meet, Jesus, the dead man, and the widow are going to be in the center with all the rest of the people gathering around to listen and see what would be. After all, as the people in the town are coming out and they see the crowd coming, I think the cry went up, “Hey, it’s Jesus!”

So, the two groups meet. I am deeply moved by verse 13. **“When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her.”** I want you to understand that although that is a good translation it still lacks just a bit in getting the full point of the words out. I would have translated, “Jesus was deeply moved so as to be filled with compassion for this woman.” Jesus knew. He knew the distress and grief of this woman and he knew why! Don’t overlook why Jesus is deeply moved.

It is because of this death. I know, we all try to accept that death is very much a part of our lives. We do all sorts of things to try and cope. Yet, as Christians, we would have to admit that death is an intrusion into our lives. We don’t want it. We don’t like it and for the most part we try to ignore and dismiss it…until it is staring directly into our lives.

I was reading the other day and the discussion I was reading was addressing the issue that people today like to dismiss the idea of “absolute truth.” The world says, “There is no absolute truth, there in only your experience and your understanding.” That is the world view. As I read that statement, the first thing that popped into my head is the fact that death is an absolute truth. If anyone were to say to me, “There is no absolute truth,” I would be inclined to respond, “Yes there is. And if there is one absolute truth then recognize there are others. The absolute fact is that one day, someday you are going to die! That is absolute truth!”

We, as God’s children recognize death as the result of sin. When Adam and Eve ate of that forbidden fruit, they were told, **“The day you eat of it, you will surely die.”** Die they did. The first death was the loss of their spiritual perfection and oneness with God. No longer were they holy and perfect, children who naturally loved and cherished God. They were now dead to God and his wonder. That’s why the hid from him. That’s why they were afraid of him! That’s why they show absolute disdain for God. They had died. Then, in an act of grace, God pronounced upon them the second type of death, our physical death, so they would always have before them a reminder of what sin has indeed brought. We physically die because we are spiritually dead to God. That’s why, no matter how hard you try, you cannot, apart from God, accept death easily.

That’s why death brings grief and sadness, and for many without Jesus, despair. The grief of this widow deeply affects Jesus, even though Jesus knew what he was going to do. The same thing happens at the death of Lazarus too! Jesus delayed so that Lazarus could die and be raised but once he got there the despair and grief of the people just overwhelmed Jesus. That’s when Scripture sums up the depth of Jesus’ feelings by simply saying, **“Jesus wept.”** Jesus is moved here too, and again Jesus is going to take action and bring his particular kind of joy and peace.

I have also always been fascinated by the fact that when Jesus touched the funeral bier those who carried it just stopped. Such a simple thing, this unspoken miracle. Two crowds meeting. I am sure the guys carrying the dead boy just wanted to move on, get to the grave and get this burial thing done for the sake of the widow. I am sure that a few of the people were absolutely appalled by Jesus’s words, **“Don’t cry.”** Like people would today, I am sure many thought him heartless and silly for saying such a shallow thing to this widow who had just lost her only son. Yet, Jesus intended to help her stop crying. Since she would have been following the dead man’s bier and since Jesus addresses her first, he then had to walk up from behind and touch the bier. They stopped! No verbal command, they just stopped because Jesus willed it. Wow!

Then Jesus does the most amazing thing. He says, **“Young man, I say to you, get up!”** Again I can well imagine the reaction of many in that crowd. They knew the man was dead. They had prepared the body, washed it, dressed it and got it ready for this trip to the grave. The man was dead and Jesus is telling him to get up! Silly, foolish, dumb ole Jesus! (By the way, that is still the reaction of the world to Jesus!) But with that command the young man sits up and begins to speak. I envision it this way. The young man is probably being carried at hip height. He is visible to those around. With the command of Jesus his eyes pop open, he probably lifts himself up on his elbows first and then fully sits up. All the while he is talking, probably wondering what in the world is going on and what is he doing out here with all these people around him. (Again, note the people carrying him don’t move. What would you have done if all of a sudden this dead man opened his eyes and began to sit up? I think you, like many, would have panicked and perhaps dropped your handhold. They do not, they are stopped!) And with that this young man is given back to his mother!

Then end result? One happy mother and one happy man! But the result among the crowd is also quite pointed. The text says this: **“Fear gripped all of them, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us’ and ‘God has visited his people.’”** The fear could be simple “awe” at what had happened, but actually I like the strength of the word “fear.” How would you feel had you been there? Fear! That’s the right word. Note they break out in praise. Remember how I mentioned the connection with the Old Testament reading. Just the fact that they declare Jesus a prophet, a spokesman for God tells us great things. “Jesus, you are a man of God and every word from you is truth!” Every one of them there understood the total wonder that Jesus had just displayed! No wonder they were inclined to say, **“God has visited his people.”** They know it is God who is the giver of life and death. It is God who has the ultimate say. These people got that right, God had visited his people! Praise and glory to Jesus for his awesome gift of life! That what Jesus is, the blessing of life!

Oh, now is the time when I will ask you if you grasp how the Epistle text fits in? In Jesus there is life, physical and spiritual life. As you read Paul’s words, did you hear how he had been spiritually dead? He was serving **“the tradition of the elders,”** not the Lord. He persecuted the followers of Christ and tried to destroy the Christian church. Because of Jesus appearing to him, he is alive, alive to God and the wonder of Jesus. Alive because Jesus gave him life, true life, spiritual life based on the fact that Jesus is our Lord and Savior from sin. That’s why Jesus came, to be our Lord and Savior from sin. That’s why He suffered and died and rose again. I say, “When the Lord calls, take the life that is given to you!” That’s the connection, Paul is speaking of the gift of eternal life that Jesus gave him.

Do you have the gift of life from Jesus? Do you hear him calling you with the desire to give you life, true life, eternal life? You were once dead in trespass and sin but are you now alive because of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins he provides? The people in the text before us have been touched by the life that is Jesus and that Jesus gives. I pray you have that gift of life from Jesus. It what our faith is about. Amen.