

## The Widow of Nain

The story of the widow of Nain is a wonderful story illustrating one of the great miracles of Jesus. The story is found in Luke 7:11-17. This is the Gospel reading of the 4th Sunday of Babah (beginning of November) in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The reading is as follows (Luke 7:11-17):

“Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He was moved with compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried *him* stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us,” and, “God has visited His people.” And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.”

Here we read about a young man who had died and was being carried out in a procession to the cemetery to be buried. As this was happening, Jesus and His disciples happened, that is, happened by divine providence, to walk by. Outside the city of Nain these two processions met: the procession of life, led by the Lord Jesus, meets the procession of death heading toward a cemetery to bury the only son of a widowed mother. At the head of one procession is a corpse, symbolizing the despair, grief, sorrow, and the hopelessness and helplessness of man. At the head of the other procession is Christ the Savior, sent to interrupt life’s tragic trek to the cemetery, to the grave, and to offer us instead salvation, hope, peace, and eternal life. And we see that the procession of life *triumphs* over the procession of death! We read that Jesus touches the casket of the dead man and says, “Young man, I say to you, arise,” and then “he who was dead sat up and began to speak.” And one can imagine the happiness that evening as the widowed mother prepared dinner for the very son whom that morning she had set out to bury in the cemetery.

Many times a miracle such as this one is referred to in the New Testament, and especially in the Gospel of St. John, as a *sign*. This miracle is thus a sign, it is a window that enables us

to look into the mind and heart of God to see who and what God is. And we look through the window of this miracle into the mind and heart of God and see first the infinite love of God!

Again and again, it is said of Jesus in the New Testament that “He was moved with compassion,” either for the crowds or for some sufferers such as the widowed mother of Nain. We repeatedly see this phrase used to describe Jesus in the Bible. This is the strongest phrase used to describe pity and compassion. It is the type of pity which moves a person to the depths of their being. For example, when Jesus saw the multitudes with all their sick people, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Matthew 14:14). When He saw the crowds like sheep without a shepherd, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Matthew 9:36). When He saw the hungry people far from home, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Mark 8:2, Matthew 15:32). When He saw the leper, we read that “He was moved with compassion” (Mark 1:41). It is important to note that, in the Gospels, this phrase is never used to describe anyone except Jesus. It is the phrase that is most characteristic of Him. It describes His reaction to human suffering and need. Jesus could not see anyone in trouble or pain, in hunger or sorrow without being “moved with compassion.” This miracle at Nain then is the sign of the great compassion and love which is always in the heart of Jesus, and therefore always in the heart of God for each one of us. And secondly, we see that the compassion and love of God is backed by the greatest power in this universe: the power of the infinitely great God, who touches the casket and says to the young man, “Young man, I say to you, arise,” and then, “he who was dead sat up and began to speak.”

Now there is little use in a Jesus who worked miracles 2000 years ago and who has ceased to work them now. What we need is a Jesus who still has the power to work miracles today. There is little relevance in a story of a Jesus who raised a dead person to life 2000 years ago but who never does that now. However, there is every, every relevance in a Christ who *to this day*, daily, raises us from the death of sin and liberates us to forgiveness, life eternal, and to a new creation.

There is little relevance in a Jesus who stilled a storm on the Sea of Galilee 2000 years ago, but who stills no storm today. But there is every bit of relevance in a Jesus who stills our storms of fear, guilt, and anxiety, which rise in our hearts today and in whose presence today every storm becomes a calm within the heart.

There is little relevance in a Jesus who turned water into wine 2000 years ago but who

never does so today. But there is every relevance in a Jesus in whose presence today there enters into life a new quality of radiance, joy, love, peace, forgiveness, exhilaration, which is like the turning of water into wine.

So the miracles of Jesus were not simply single events in time. They were illustrations, they were examples and insights into that which is always going on and what Jesus always is and will ever be. They are windows into the reality of God.

For Jesus did not just once raise a man from the dead. He is forever and for all true believers the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Jesus did not just once feed 5000 people. That is a window through which we look to see that He is the “bread of life,” of which if any person eats, he shall forever never hunger again (John 6:35). And Jesus did not just once open the eyes of a blind man. He is forever “the light of the world” (John 8:12). As Jesus says, “He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life” (John 8:12). And Jesus did not just once empower sinners to become saints and the weak to become strong. He does that today every time we come to Him in prayer and with faith to claim His power. There is an inscription on a door which reads, “we believe that the power within us is greater than the task before us.” That is true because the power within us is the power of Jesus who raised the young man from the grave in the Gospel passage above, and there is no greater power than that in this universe. As He raised the dead man, so through repentance, Jesus raises us daily when we fall. And He will raise us on the last day from our graves when He comes again to “judge the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42), and to establish His eternal kingdom.

So what Jesus did in that tiny village of Nain centuries ago has relevance for us today. It is a *sign* of God’s great compassion. Jesus was “moved with compassion” for the widow and her son as He is still moved with compassion today for us. And backed by the greatest power in this universe, the compassion of Jesus touched the casket of the dead man and brought him back to life. It is no wonder that the people who were there that witnessed this miracle said, “God has visited His people” (Luke 7:16). How else could they explain it? He visited His people then and He continues to visit us today and abide in us through the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Glory be to God forever. Amen!