In life, there are some things we never want to face. People down south do not ever want to face a disaster the size of Hurricane Katrina. We do not want to face an F-5 tornado. We today do not want to face economic turmoil like our parents and grandparents did in the Great Depression.

On the top of the list of things you and I do not want to face in life is the death of a loved one. Homes can be rebuilt. Savings can be replenished. But if a Christian loved one dies, that seems permanent. Today in Luke 7, we see Jesus do something which takes away the fear of facing the death of a Christian loved one. Today we say with those who witnessed this wonderful miracle in Nain: GOD HAS COME TO HELP HIS PEOPLE! - to offer his love when we grieve and to turn back death itself.

Our text begins: Soon afterward Jesus went on his way to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd were traveling with him. At this time, it is still early in Jesus’ ministry. He had been going throughout the towns in Galilee teaching and healing the people. On this particular day, Jesus went to a town called Nain. The day before, he had been in Capernaum where he healed a centurion’s servant, as we heard last week. Before that, Jesus had healed a paralytic and a man with leprosy. Word of his miracles spread and that is why a large crowd was following him. These people were about to witness Jesus’ most striking and powerful miracle yet.

As he was approaching the town gate, there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mom. she was a widow. Two crowds of people met at the town gate. The crowd entering the city with Jesus wanted to know more about him. They were excited and hoping to hear more of his teaching and were hoping to see more of his miracles.

The other crowd was coming out of the city in a funeral procession. Instead of being hopeful and excited, they were sadly following a coffin.

Note who is at the front of that crowd. It was not just a grieving mother who was also a widow. She was a mother whose only son died after her husband died. Imagine her pain. Ponder what she may have been thinking: Why him? Why did he die before me? It isn’t supposed to be like this! She bore the heaviest of crosses. Her husband – the love of her life and best friend – had died. That, in and of itself, is certainly more than enough pain to bear. But now her only child - one of her only sources of joy in the absence of her late husband - had died. What an awful load to bear!

All the pain of her husband and only child dying aside, this woman had a rough road ahead of her. Husbands in Jesus’ day were the sole providers for the family. If a woman lost her husband, no consistent means of being provided for remained. Widows at that time had to rely on charity. If this woman still had her son, he could have worked to provide food for them, but now he was gone too. Could it get any worse for her?

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her. The two crowds met. The head of the one entering the city saw the head of the one going out to the graveyard. And Jesus felt great compassion for her, as reading says. But it is really stronger than that. The Greek really says that his whole inner being hurt for her and with her. Why?

He knew better than any other what loss meant. The perfection of his creation had been undone by man’s sin. It was not supposed to be like this. Sin and death were not supposed to be part of the picture, but they were. Yes, the Lord knew what it meant to lose that which he
loved the most. That is also why his heart went out to the widow of Nain.

Many of us have witnessed pain like the widow of Nain. It is the nature of living in a sin-corrupted world. We see death all around us. We see the numbness in the eyes of parents who have to carry a little casket to the cemetery. We see the anxiety on the face of a husband as he watches his wife’s cancer tear her away from him. We see the gold star in the window of a widow who just days before received a notice that her husband of one year was killed in combat. Our hearts go out to all of them. Any words of comfort we offer seem inadequate. All we can do is hurt for them and cry with them. Could it get any worse?

Have you felt the pain of a loved one dying? Some parents have put a child in the ground and felt that numbness. Some of us have seen a spouse slowly and painfully die of cancer. Some of us have gathered at the burial of a Christian loved one suddenly and unexpectedly taken from us. Yes, we know the pain of death well. More than that, when we see that casket, we know that death is the just wages of our own sinfulness. Does it get any worse than that?

Sure, we get the cards, the condolences, the flowers, the company and the sympathy, and we are very grateful for them. But that hole in our hearts is still there. How can it ever be filled? Who is able to give enough compassion, enough love to fill such a bottomless void? Jesus. Just as his heart went out to her in her grief, so too does it go out to us in ours. When we hurt, the one who loves us more than anyone, hurts with us. Psalm 10 tells us: But you, O God, do see the trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. the victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

When we hurt, turn to our Lord Jesus because he offers his compassion. He knows our pain full well. We find great comfort in the true words of the hymn writer: Be still my soul; your Jesus can repay from his own fullness all he takes away. God has come to help his people to offer them his love and compassion when they grieve.

But he offers so much more than his compassion and love when we grieve. God has come to help his people, to even turn back death itself. Look at our text. Jesus does some things that we would think ridiculous, considering the circumstances. He said: Do not cry. With all due respect, that seems impossible to ask this grieving and now childless widow! Understand that this is not a stoic command. Jesus is not saying that to cry at the death of a loved one is improper. No, he spoke these two simple words gently and with love. But still, isn’t Jesus asking a lot? No, because he is about to take away the reason for her tears.

He went up to the open coffin, touched it, and the pallbearers stopped. He said, Young man, I say to you, get up! Notice how bold Jesus actions are! Who in their right mind would stop a funeral procession as Jesus did here? We would not dare, but Jesus, the Lord of Life, would. He firmly put his hand on the coffin and stopped its journey to the grave. Then he did the most unexpected and perhaps inappropriate thing that could be done in a funeral procession. With authority, he told the young man to get up, as if he were only sleeping! How ridiculous this seemed to the people there! But then the young man actually listened!

The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. The dead man was brought back to life at Jesus’ command. Just his words are enough to turn back death. What authority! What power! What relief and joy for that grieving mother and widow! She was childless no more. Jesus gave her son back to her. She would no longer have to bear such grief and pain the rest of her life. No longer was she resigned to a life of begging for food and being constantly reminded of her great loss.

Though they were there for different reasons, both crowds witnessed this striking display of God’s power. Fear gripped all of them, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has arisen among us and God has visited his people! This was reported about him in all
of Judea and in all the surrounding countryside. Jesus had been sent from God. He had the power from God to turn back death. The people realized that Jesus was a great prophet. They then spread the word about throughout Galilee, all the way south to Judea, the other end of the Jewish nation. This Jesus was God come to help his people.

This certainly is one of Jesus’ most striking miracles. But what comfort can you and I take from this miracle? Jesus is not here to bring our loved ones back to life. Death is still an everyday occurrence. Even in the case of that only son of a widow, yes, he had been brought back to life, but he would have to die once again. How can this miracle gives us lasting comfort if Jesus is not at our funerals telling the one in the coffin to get up?

It is his power over death. Did Jesus have to spend hrs chanting to bring the dead back to life. Did he have to mix a potion or perform CPR? No, he spoke and death self turned backward. What power over death our Savior wields! That is our comfort and joy today!

He used this power to turn back death for all of us. This miracle was done as a testimony to the fact that he was the promised Savior and had come to do a more amazing thing than this. He had come to help his people by dying and then rising again. In so doing he forgave all sin and turned back death for all who believe in him. Sin and death never had a chance. The bonds of death were shattered when they tried to hold the Son of God.

Now, since death could not hold him, it cannot hold us! Death may separate us from our Christian loved ones for a while here on earth. It may take us and turn our bodies back to dust, but Jesus wins in the end. Thanks to his death and his resurrection, our time in the grave is only temporary. One day he will also say to us: I say to you, Get up! At that moment all of Jesus’ faithful people will burst forth from the grave. We will be given new, perfect and immortal bodies and then we will spend eternity with him.

Yes, we may cry at funerals and grieve when our Christian loved ones die. But our tears will dry because Jesus gives us the ultimate victory. God has come to help his people, to even turn back death! As Paul writes: We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve in the same way as the others, who have no hope. Indeed, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then in the same way we also believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. And so we will always be with the Lord.

God has come to help his people as Isaiah says: To comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. So as we walk this vale of tears and grieve, may this song of joy make us weep no more. May we sing it in the sureness of the victory over death Jesus gives: God has come to help his people! Amen.

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