

"Where Were You?"

Luke 7:11-17

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father, and from our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The title of the sermon is three simple words: "*Where Were You?*" Simple question. Easy. Can't be misunderstood. But then again...

Simple sentences can be altered dramatically by voice inflection and emphasis. Emphasize the first word, and it sounds like the one asking the question is looking for clarification, as in: "I know you were in the mall, but where were you in the mall?" Emphasize the second word, and you instantly get the picture of impatience: "Where were you?" – as is, "*You were supposed to be here over an hour ago.*" Emphasize the last word and you get the sense that someone was lost for a time, or that the person wasn't where you expected to find him: "*I showed up for the meeting right on time. Where were you?*"

This morning we are going to apply that simple question to our text. We are going to ask the question of ourselves, emphasizing each word in an attempt to better apply this section of Scripture to ourselves. As always, we want to *participate* in the Scriptures, not sit idly by as though we are spectators of an event that affects only others. We are not here to be entertained; we are here to learn, grow, and be comforted and strengthened. The text through which, by God's grace, we will gain such gifts and to which we apply our simple question is found in Luke's Gospel, the 7th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Luke 7:11-17** *Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹² 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 a considerable crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴ Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶ Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" ¹⁷ And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.*

So far the Word of God. These *are* God's words. Remind yourself of this fact and you will be better prepared to study these holy words of truth. That our God would now open our hearts and fill them with his truth and wisdom, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

Our text is the classic account of just what happens when life meets death. Think of the two processions that met that day outside of the City of Nain. The one, led by Jesus, was full of joyful, boisterous people – with good reason. They were with Jesus, who had just finished delivering his radical, momentous Sermon on the Mount. At this point Jesus was still a novelty to the people – a very *popular* novelty. His reputation was growing and he enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the masses. The future for this group seemed bright and unlimited – nothing but possibilities as far as the eye could see.

This is the procession going into the City of Nain that met a very different procession coming out of the city. While the first procession was led by the Lord of Life himself, this second procession was led by death – tragic, crippling death. A woman, already a widow, had just lost her only son. The members of this procession undoubtedly recognized the great tragedy of the moment. Parents are just not supposed to have to bury their children. Life is hard enough when it is the other way around. There were also in those days no government welfare agencies to look after the poor. The widow's sense of loss must therefore have only been heightened by the prospect of living the rest of her life in poverty and want.

We get then a sense of the very different moods of these two groups. The question is which will yield? In the normal course of human events, the joyful, energized crowd would step politely to one side, bow their heads in respect, and give way to death. Death, after all, is a brute, a bully. It is the unstoppable torrent that eventually sweeps away all who stand in its path. Death yields to no one.

But death had never met anyone like Jesus Christ.

You know the outcome. You read it in our text. Death had finally met a Power greater than itself. With a touch and a word, death yielded. It had no choice. The power of the Son of God was irresistible, and what had previously been a maudlin, depressed crowd was swept into the procession of life and joy.

And perhaps more than just the procession of physical life. These folks came to understand that there was in Jesus a power beyond anything they had ever seen or experienced. One day we will perhaps learn how many were also swept into the procession of *spiritual* life on that day.

That is the account as we know it. Those are the bare facts of what happened on that day. If that were all there was to it, we could all smile and go about our day with the pleasant but fading glow of a great story with a happy ending. But did the story have a happy ending? Were the woman and her son brought to saving faith? Every single person in that crowd has long since also died. Did they die as believers?

More to the point for you and me today, what does this story have to do with us? What are we supposed to learn? How are we supposed to grow and be strengthened and comforted by this account? Where is our "happily ever after"?

That's where our question comes in: "Where were you?"

You are, after all, in this story. Have you found your own face yet in either of the crowds that met that day outside of Nain? Look carefully. Where were you?

You see, the first word we need to emphasize in that question is the last word – you: *Where were you?*

God's Word is always supposed to be intensely personal, just like your relationship with your God. This is sometimes hardest for young people to get, and parents often unknowingly make the problem worse. The true art-form of parenting is to raise children to recognize the direct connection they have with their God – to learn to know that it's not: child to parent to God; it is: child to God – directly and with no intermediaries. This is infinitely more challenging than it sounds. For some reason parents find it much easier to think and act in terms of *my* rules rather than *God's* rules. They unwittingly therefore raise their children to think and act as though their primary relationship is with their parents. You can see the obvious problem. Whenever parents fail to connect their children directly to their God, children grow up believing that all they have to do is get by their parents – and parents are easily fooled. In the minds of young people that means, for example, that if their parents don't catch them breaking a rule or law, they've "gotten away with it." On the other hand, when children are taught from early on that their relationship is directly with God, they will immediately come to recognize that they never "get away with" *anything*. Ever. God knows. God sees. God hears. That's also why children raised to

have a direct relationship with their God don't tend to go all Justin Bieber when they go off to college or finally get their own place. The transition then from living with parents to living on your own is really no transition at all, since that child's relationship with God never changes.

So also in our text for this morning. This was really not all about the young man who died and was raised to life. It wasn't all about the poor grieving mother whose dark day of despair was turned to utter joy by what Jesus did for her. It wasn't about the crowds. This morning it is all about you – you and your relationship to *your* God. Unless you, you personally, have a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ, you cannot be saved. Unless you have and retain such a relationship with your God, you cannot exist in the procession of life. So just *where* were you in our text? Emphasize now the first word in our sermon theme. Look carefully. *Where* do you see your own face?

You don't, do you? Try as you might you just cannot see yourself in either crowd. That's because you are not in either crowd. You are looking in the wrong place. The fact is you were in the casket. Look carefully *there*, and that is where you will see your own lifeless countenance. In all of this, you are the dead person that is being carried by the world to your own burial.

But then Jesus Christ happened by. He spoke to you through the words of the Apostles and Prophets. You are the one in our text who was brought to life. Jesus did that, *for you, in you*.

How foolish to imagine that you and I could do such things on our own. We had no more hope of deciding for Christ or earning our way to heaven through our own natural goodness or good works than that young man had of raising himself out of his coffin. But God's Word has such power, and that power has also been directed toward you. To you, lying helplessly in spiritual death, that Savior has spoken his word – the words that create spiritual life just as surely as they once created all life itself during the six days of creation. As the young man knew not that he was dead, so you and I neither knew nor cared that we too were spiritually dead and alienated from our God – headed inexorably toward an eternity of unimaginable agony and despair. Man often mistakes the debauchery of sin for freedom. It was in fact slavery of the worst sort. It was Jesus Christ alone who changed all that in you.

Which brings us to the word of our question that we need to emphasize last: *Where were you?* Notice the past tense. That's because you aren't there anymore. Having finally found your own face there in the

scene described in our text, don't you dare turn away until you see it to the end, for that's where the true comfort lies. Death has given way to life *also in you. You. You were "dead in trespasses and sins,"* but you are no longer so – not when you believe that Jesus paid for every single one of your sins. Through the means of grace – through the hearing of the Word or the through the miraculous power of the Word connected to the waters of baptism – through those means of grace Jesus also stopped your own personal funeral procession. He touched your life, spoke to your heart, and raised you from spiritual death to a life that will never end.

Where *were* you? You were dead, though you knew it not. You were in the procession of death, headed for hell without a care. But that is not where you are going now, is it? Now you've joined the procession of life.

But that procession is still far too small. Open your eyes to see the funeral processions shuffling by you every single day of your life. This same miracle described in our text can be repeated over and over again in your life. By God's grace you are no longer lying helpless in the coffin. But your neighbor is. Your friend is. You have family members who are. They probably don't look like it, but they are. Tragically enough the souls in the funeral processions of this world often appear to be even more joyful and content than those who are already marching in the procession of life. Don't be fooled. Pray God for the wisdom to recognize the truth of how things really are. Isn't that exactly why our God preserved the words of our text even down to this very day? It wasn't just so that we could hear a great story that ended well. It wasn't even just so that we could thrill to the miracle of our own personal rescue. It was also so that you and I might gain the wisdom and love necessary to have this miracle repeated over and over again in our own individual procession of life.

To this end, carry home with you these powerful words from 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, for they truly define our lives and purpose as Christians:
"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Where *were* you? Lost, dead, and helpless in the funeral procession to hell. Where *are* you now? On the path of life eternal through faith alone in Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit remind us every single day that there's unlimited room for more on that path. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **1 Kings 17:17-24** After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. ¹⁸ And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" ¹⁹ And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. ²⁰ And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" ²¹ Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." ²² And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. ²³ And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives." ²⁴ And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

ESV **Galatians 1:11-24** For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ ¶ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President

Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 5, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 536 (Red Hymnal)

"Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (1 Kings 17:17-24) Our Old Testament lesson took place at a time of great suffering in Israel. In an attempt to call the people to repentance, the Lord allowed a severe drought and famine to afflict the land. The Prophet Elijah was given refuge at a widow's home in Zarephath, where God allowed them an unending supply of oil and flour. This is the account of the death of the woman's son, and how God also provided for that need. The great truth we gain from his lesson is the unending forgiveness that is ours, and the life that is now also ours as a result.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40)

The Second Lesson: (Galatians 1:11-24) Even while he was still alive, doubters tried to discredit Paul and the gospel he preached. Paul here makes no effort to hide the fact that he had previously persecuted the same Lord Jesus he was now serving so tirelessly. Don't miss the comfort this section of Scripture holds out for every single sinner. There is unlimited forgiveness for those who have sinned. No matter how terrible your past, the full debt of sin has been paid by Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is ours through faith in that same Lord Jesus.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn –371 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Alas, My God, My Sins Are Great"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 7:11-17 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Where Were You?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -371 (Verses 5-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Alas, My God, My Sins Are Great"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -46 (Red Hymnal)

"On What has Now been Sown "

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sunday (36) Ave (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

CLC News – Seminary graduate Joseph Naumann has returned the call to Mt Zion of Detroit and accepted the call to Immanuel of Mankato, MN. Teacher Jeff Karnitz has accepted the call to Gethsemane School of Spokane, WA. Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids has called Pastor George Dummann. Faith Lutheran of Markesan, WI has called Pastor Nathanael Mayhew. Ascension Lutheran of Batavia (Chicago area) has called Pastor Matthew Ude, who recently resigned his call to the foreign mission fields of India and Africa.

Vacation Bible School – We are currently in the process of organizing this year's Vacation Bible School. Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table and contact VBS Coordinator Sandy Roehl if you have any questions.

Leota Schiermeister Update – Leota underwent successful spinal surgery on Friday, and is recovering in the University of MN hospital in St Paul. To this point the doctors are pleased with the outcome. Depending on how things go, they expect to be there anywhere from nine days to several weeks. Please keep the family in your prayers.

West Central Delegate Conference – This past week Pastor Roehl attended the West Central Delegate Conference in Jamestown. Many fine papers were delivered, copies of which are available from the Pastor by request. Much time was also spent discussing the issues that will be discussed at the upcoming CLC Convention in Eau Claire later this month.