

"Where Were You?"

Luke 2:11-17

May the faith that has been created in your heart by God the Holy Spirit never know doubt or uncertainty, and may you live every moment of your life in thanksgiving for the eternal life that has been given to you. 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 didn't ask that. I asked, 'Where were you?'" Emphasize the second word, and you instantly get the picture of impatience: "Where were you?" – as is, "*I've been waiting for over an hour.*" Emphasize the last word and you get the sense that someone wasn't where you expected to find him: "*Where were you? I thought we were supposed to meet for lunch?*"

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 are to *participate* in the Scriptures. 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.*

This is the Word of God. 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 the 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 life-changing Sermon on the Mount. At this point Jesus was still a novelty to the people. His popularity was growing and he enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the masses. The future for this group seemed bright and unlimited – only 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 crowd that followed 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 souls 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? That's the first word we need to emphasize, 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. 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, that means they've gotten away with it. On the other hand, when children are taught from early on that it is really between them and their 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.

So also in our text for this morning. This is 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, come to know and believe in 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 there. You are looking in the wrong place. You were not in either crowd, 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 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 – that Word that creates spiritual life just as surely as it 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 and life. 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 did indeed pay 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 the power of his Word 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. 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. With opened eyes you can now see the funeral processions shuffling by 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 undeserved love 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. Your eyes have been opened to recognize not only the truth that ***“whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life,”*** but also the terrible fate of those who do not. You have not only been raised to life, you have been given your life's work, which is to stand in the torrent of the spiritually dead and to share with them that same Word of power that brought you life.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21: ***“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.”*** What is that appeal we are to make on God's behalf? Paul goes on to tell us exactly what it is: ***“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. Thank God! Amen.

ESV **(1 Kings 19:9-21)** And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹¹ And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹⁵ And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." ¹⁹ So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" ²¹ And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

ESV **(Galatians 5:13-25)** For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

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The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 29, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 161 (Blue Hymnal)

"All People That on Earth Do Dwell"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. (Blue Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (1 Kings 19:9-21) Our first reading reminds us just how easy it can be for God's children to lose track of the role they are to play in God's master plan. In our first reading, Elijah had just come from a stunning display of God's power on Mt. Carmel, where 850 priests of Baal and Asherah were humbled and slaughtered. Enraged, Queen Jezebel swore to take Elijah's life, so Elijah fled into the wilderness, lamenting that he alone was left. God made it clear to Elijah that He was still in control and still had a specific role for Elijah to play. That is what we today should seek – to know and do God's will, accepting our own human limitations.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 19 (Blue Hymnal Page 61)

The Second Lesson: (Galatians 5:13-25) Our second reading reminds us just how easy it is for us to lose track of ourselves – to forget not only that we are just God's humble servants, but that within every Christian there is both good and evil. This is an awareness we absolutely need to possess if we are to guard ourselves *from ourselves*. Here we are reminded of the two natures of man, and the fruits of each. As Paul here reminds us, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" – daily putting on the new man.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Blue Hymnal page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 386 (Blue Hymnal)

"We Sing the Almighty Power of God"

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

"Where Were You?"

The Offertory – (Blue Hymnal page 7)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 432 (Blue Hymnal)

"All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 179 (Stanzas 1-2, 4) (Blue Hymnal)

"My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker"

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 and around the world. 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 (35) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Mark Tiefel has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire, WI, has resigned his current call, and is stepping down from the pastoral ministry. Pastor Aaron Ude has returned the call to St. Stephen of Mountain View, CA. Messiah of Eau Claire has called Pastor Thomas Naumann.

Women's Retreat West – Registration is now open for this year's Women's Retreat West, to be held in Sioux Falls from September 19-21. The theme this year is "Pieces of Jesus' Peace". To register, go to womensretreat.clclutheran.net, click on WEST, and fill out the form. Questions can be addressed to womensretreatwest@gmail.com.

Coordinating Council Summary – A summary of the Spring meeting of the CLC Coordinating Council is available on the mailbox table. The Coordinating Council is comprised of members of each of the CLC Boards, together with the praesidium, and manages the affairs of the Synod between conventions.

VBS and Picnic – Vacation Bible School is scheduled for August 4th-8th and the Church Picnic for August 10th.