

Luke 7:11–17  
16th Sun. after Trinity  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch./  
Trinity, Frankfurt  
September 24, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

If you've ever been present at a Christian deathbed or funeral, you've probably heard recited those familiar words of Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." This fallen, sinful world is the valley of the shadow of death. Even if you're not looking at death directly in the face, at least not yet, you see signs of it all around, the shadows and dark thoughts of what awaits you just around the corner. The autumn months, especially, remind us that this world and we ourselves are passing away. The seasons and the years come and go and the cycle seems to pick up pace the older you get. The vibrant life of spring and summer begins to decay. The youthful green leaves turn brown, fall to the ground, and crumble as the cold, dark winter approaches. That's what's happening to you, too, and to everyone you know and love. Death is casting its long shadows over this once bright valley.

Most people today can't bear the thought of death. They'll do anything to avoid contemplating this reality. From doing whatever possible, however grotesque, to look youthful again, to reverting to the books, movies, and activities of childhood, to hiding away their older relatives and ignoring them lest they become a reminder that you, too, are growing old and approaching the end, society today is paralyzed at the thought of dying. The reality of death is sometimes accepted with seeming indifference, but below the service is a deep dread at the prospect of nothingness. For those with no hope of the life to come in Jesus Christ, the

lengthening shadow of death strikes terror. Death will come for you and your loved ones, maybe sooner or maybe later, but it will come. The dark valley is growing darker.

In our Gospel Lesson today, Jesus went to the town called Nain with His disciples and a great crowd. The word “Nain” means “charming” or “beautiful.” The town of Nain was nestled up along a mountainside in the Jezreel valley—a charming, beautiful place in a charming, beautiful valley. But the beautiful valley had turned into the valley of the shadow of death. As Jesus and His followers drew near to the gate of the town, they came across a funeral procession. It seems like chance, but Jesus knew precisely the day, the hour, and the minute of His arrival. So it always goes with Jesus, even today. He comes to the valley of the shadow of death to comfort those who mourn. The only son of a widow was being carried out for burial. All the roots of this woman’s life had been pulled from the earth. Her husband was dead. Her only-begotten son was dead. There was a great crowd with Jesus and a considerable crowd from the town with the grieving mother, but in the valley of the shadow of death this woman was all alone.

Jesus walks through that valley of tears and meets the woman to bring her comfort and hope. Jesus has compassion on the woman and says to her: “Do not weep.” Apart from what Jesus does next, this command would make no sense. “Do not weep.” How could you tell a mother mourning her only son to stop crying? Who could hold back tears at a horrible time like that? But Jesus can say: “Do not weep” because He’s about to give this dead son back to his mother. Jesus comes up and touches the bier and the pallbearers stand still. Jesus interrupted the steady march to the grave. Then our LORD says: “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Jesus could tell the woman: “Do not weep” because He was about to take away the woman’s reason for weeping. He could wipe the tears from this woman’s eyes because He swallows up death in victory. The presence of

Jesus turns the valley of the shadow of death, the vale of tears, back into a charming, beautiful valley. The valley of death is now filled with new life and rejoicing!

Just a few kilometers away from Nain, in that same charming valley, was the town of Shunem. Centuries earlier, the prophet Elisha had raised the Shunammite widow's son from the dead (2 Kings 4). And before Elisha, the prophet Elija raised the widow of Zerephath's son from the dead. That's our Old Testament Lesson for today. God worked through His prophets of old to miraculously raise the dead to new life. That's why the people of Nain feared and glorified God, saying: "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited His people!". As the prophets of old raised the dead, now Jesus raises the dead as more than a prophet. Jesus is God become man who visits His people to redeem them. He comes to this world, to this valley of the shadow of death and makes it a beautiful and charming valley, a foretaste of eternal life.

The death and resurrection accounts in the Old Testament and in the life of Jesus, are a picture of the death and resurrection of Jesus Himself. Our LORD Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father, visited His people to take upon Himself their sins and iniquities, their sicknesses and even death itself. He was nailed to the cross and the people mocked Him, saying: "He saved others but He can't save Himself." Jesus raised others from the dead, could He not keep Himself from death? Yes, but first He had to die as punishment for the sins of the world, the perfect sacrifice, God in the flesh, paying for the sins of all flesh. He died and was buried, and on the third day rose again from the dead. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He raised the dead to new life, and after He Himself died, He too was raised again to new life. And Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him (Rom 6:9). Death did not conquer Jesus; Jesus conquered death. Jesus, the light of the world, chases away

the darkness of the shadow of death. He who walked through that same dark valley you must walk transforms the vale of tears into the heights of joy.

That's all great for the widow of Nain and for the other widows who lost their children to death but then had them back again that very day. But what about the rest of us, who lose loved ones and they don't return? Wouldn't we like to have Jesus return our dead family and friends to the land of the living right now? And what about us? If Jesus raises the dead then why even let us die in the first place? But the wages of sin is still death. We still sin, therefore, we still die. Even this widow's son would die again. The solution was only temporary, a foreshadowing of what is to come. In the resurrection accounts of Scripture, we have a type and image of the Resurrection of Christ and an image of our future resurrection from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead never to die again, and when He raises you and all believers from the dead on the Last Day, you won't ever die again, either. Then you will live for eternity in your resurrected body in the new heavens and the new earth.

This past week in Kaiserslautern and today in Frankfurt we witness nothing short of a Resurrection, though one that must be viewed according to faith, not sight. In Holy Baptism, you were united to Christ in His death. In Holy Baptism, you were buried with Jesus into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, you, too, might walk in newness of life. On Wednesday, Sterling was united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. Today, Annalisa was united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. These children were buried with Jesus by Baptism into death that they might rise again from the dead on the Last Day. In Baptism, you, too, were united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. You were born a sinner, but God washed you in the blood of Jesus. You were clothed with Christ so that the sin you were born with and the sins you commit everyday until the day you die are covered by

the righteousness of Christ. When God looks at you now, He no longer sees your sins and your failures. God sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

In Baptism, you were born again of water and the Holy Spirit. It's been said that he who is born twice dies once, and he who is born once dies twice. In Baptism, you were born a second time, so now when you come to the end of your earthly pilgrimage and die, you will live forever when Jesus returns to raise the dead. But those who are born into this sinful world and never born a second time in Baptism will die like everyone else, but after death they will be given their portion in the lake that burns with sulfur and fire, which is the second death (Rev. 21:8). He who is born twice dies once, and he who is born once dies twice. Thank God for drowning our old Adam in the waters of Holy Baptism and raising us again to new life in Jesus Christ!

That Holy Baptism we undergo once in our life carries us throughout life. You can only be born again once. Everyday, the baptized then return to their baptism in repentance, in sorrow over sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Your Baptism is a daily reminder to confess your sins and receive forgiveness, to walk in the light of God's Word and focus on the goal that is set before you: eternal life at the resurrection of the dead. That's why the parents of baptized children and the sponsors are to see to it that these children are raised in the faith, that they learn God's Word and participate fully in the life of the church. Too many parents neglect their children's spiritual well-being. After a child is born physically into this world, she needs to be fed and taken care of, looked after and raised properly. After a child of God is born again in Baptism, she needs to be fed God's Word and taken care of, looked after and raised in the church.

Baptism and the entire life that follows Baptism belong together. And it's up to the parents and the church to see to it. Jesus says: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them." Bring your children to Baptism. Bring your children to church every week. Bring

your children to Jesus in the Word of God everyday, where He calls them, even as He calls to you right now: Do not weep, dear Christian. Here you still must wander through the valley of the shadow of death, but Jesus is turning that valley of sorrow into a valley of joy. You died with Christ in Baptism, so now you will also live with Him, not only now, but in eternity. It might seem like something so far away or so unbelievable. But the same Jesus who raised the widow of Nain's son will at a distinct point in history return to raise you and all believers from the dead. Do not weep. Do not fear. Jesus is the first and the last, the living one. He died, but behold, He is alive forevermore. In Him, you died, and so you will live. He who called you is faithful, He who created you is faithful, He who re-created you is faithful; He will surely do it. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.