

Proper 5C – 2nd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
June 6, a.D. 2010
Luke 7: 11 – 17

For some people, life hasn't turned out the way they expected. Isn't that the way it is for you when your life took an unexpected turn? If you didn't see that one coming then you most likely did not prepare for it. For someone who agrees with the motto of the Boy Scouts, "Be prepared", being unprepared leaves you in an uncomfortable position. Shaken to the core of your being, you are left vulnerable and all alone.

Vulnerability and loneliness leads to desperation. You may be ripe to try just about anything. It's fashionable today to hire life coaches to help you cope with life's bitter disappointments. There are also other voices around that encourage you to unleash the power within and to stand up and take control of your life. Self-help books can be bought to the point where it makes the authors and publishers rich and leaves the penniless right where they are.

Doesn't that summarize the problem with all our attempts to fix life so that it turns out the way we want it?

What if that unexpected twist in life represented only one shoe that dropped? What happens when the other shoe drops? And then another and another? What if your life has taken one unexpected turn after another and there have been so many of them, you don't know which way you are going anymore? Knocked down from the path that you once expected, again and again you don't feel like getting up anymore?

Perhaps this brings us to the way the widow of Nain felt when she had to bury her one and only son. She already was widowed. Saying farewell to her husband already meant that all the hopes and dreams and goals of wedded life were buried, shattered, gone forever.

Then life took another unexpected turn when she had to bury her only begotten son. You have heard it said that the hardest thing for a parent is to bury a child. When a loving and devoted mother must bury her child, it is common for her to make a trade with God, her life for her child's. How many times did she make that trade with God? To say it is hard to bury a child is one thing, to experience it is quite another. It is true that you don't really know what it feels like unless you go through it. That certainly narrows

down the sources of help and the trusted voices of friends who have gone through the exact same things you have. No wonder we feel so alone.

Buried with grief and inconsolable may describe what she felt like the moment that our Lord, his disciples and a large crowd were entering the town called Nain. Coming out of Nain was a funeral procession. A coffin was carried that may well have been nothing more than a crude wooden bed with a cloth draping over the boy's cold body. But together with burying the body of the boy, the widow buried her joy, her hope, her source of income that may well have been planned for later in life.

Jesus saw her. His heart was moved by compassion. He stopped the funeral procession and touched the coffin and then spoke to the dead boy and the boy listened and was alive again. In that very moment when the widow had given up hope, she received great comfort. Christ turned her sadness into joy. He is the helper of the helpless and makes us stop and think about him. This text like all of holy Scripture is all about Jesus.

Death must flee when it has met its match. Who else can command the dead to become alive? Who else is so powerful, so strong and mighty to save that by his will, life is restored, life begins and life has no end.

When the people saw His power over life and death, it filled their hearts with fear. Fear like that happens when it becomes clear that life is not an accident. It is not self-generated nor self-regulated. There is one greater. Power like that should fill your heart with fear because the one who gives life can also take it away. What is He going to do with me? There is someone who is going to ask me how I lived my life. Since he gave me life, I am accountable to him.

What is he going to do with me and all my misspent years, gossip from my lips against my own friends, so much wasted time, wallowing in self-pity and being so absorbed in me, I cannot love others. He who is holy must surely be disgusted with me. If he is going to act according to his power He will surely kill me.

But our Lord's miracle of raising the dead and reviving the joy of the widow's life flowed from his compassion. The widow did not deserve his act of kindness because she already suffered. Christ simply gave her son back because he is gracious, filled with mercy toward us and does not treat us according to what we deserve. That's what faith is

... trusting that God will treat me according to his compassion not his power or his holiness or his majesty but solely on the basis of his gracious promise to me.

When Jesus touched the coffin of the dead boy, he acted in love. He went way beyond what the law of Moses and ultimate power can do, and acted in love to stop death, your death and give you his life. He touched your death in your place and gave you his life. For on the day of his funeral procession, there was no one to stop his brutal and senseless death. His cold and lifeless body was carried into his grave in order to sanctify yours. He gave his life for you. His compassion made it all possible.

When God directs your life, He turns every bitter disappointment in life and every unexpected turn into good. He makes it all happen because he is at the center of life. He is your life, for death must flee before Him.