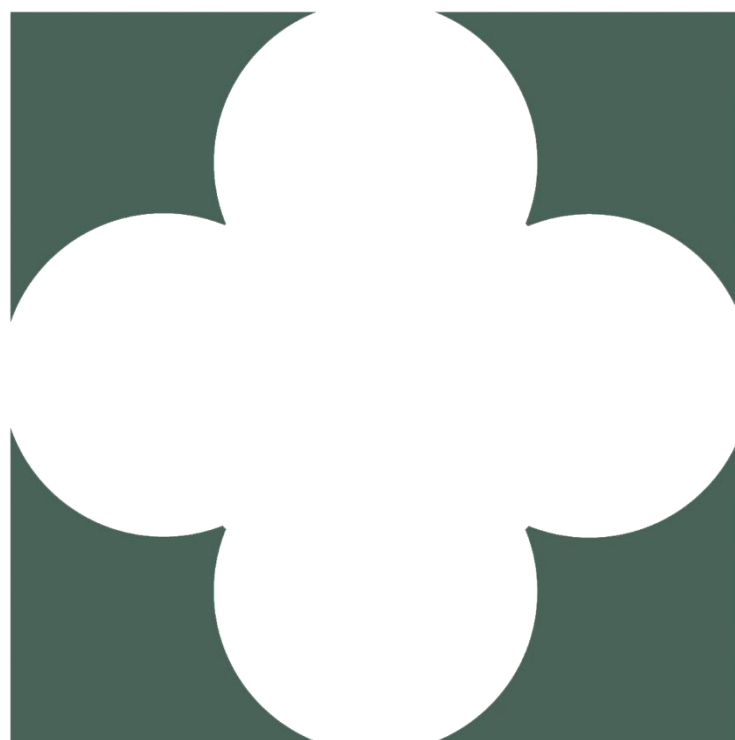


# Moving with Compassion to Action

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Luke 7:11-17

### Luke 7:11-17

*Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.*

In *Year W, Lectionary for the Whole Church* by Dr. Wilda C. Gafney, she combines the scripture that was read today by Rev. Carol Sutton with the story of the prophet Elijah, who brought life back into the dead son of the widow from Zerephath. The story of Elijah is found in the Hebrew Scriptures, I Kings 17.

Luke used this story of Jesus to make it plain to the hearers that Jesus was a great healer and a prophet. Those who heard this story, or witnessed this act of compassion, would have immediately made the connection between Jesus and the prophet Elijah, whom God used to bring life back to that which was dead.

Luke's point was that Jesus was greater than Elijah, because Jesus could change a situation just by touching the funeral bier. He didn't need to pray for God to act. Jesus himself had the power and authority to give life.

So, there is a strong correlation between this gospel story and the Hebrew scriptures.

In our story, Jesus is on his way to a town called Nain. His popularity was already growing, and a large crowd followed him from Capernaum to Nain. While in Capernaum Jesus healed the slave of a military man who was near

death. So a crowd was already enthralled, and perhaps intrigued, by what this man Jesus could do. So they followed him to the next town, Nain.

As Jesus and his entourage reached the gate of the city there was a funeral procession in progress. We don't know much about the popularity of the mother, or the son, but the text tells us it was a large funeral procession. The crowd with Jesus ran into the crowd going to the cemetery.

The mother had already experienced great loss in her life by the death of her husband. Those of you who have lost the love of your life to death can relate to the broken heart that accompanied this woman everywhere she went. But after the death of her husband, she at least had the comfort, economic stability, and social standing that came with having a son. That was—until his death.

Jesus saw the large funeral procession and the mother obviously in distress. We don't know if she was wailing, but we do know she was weeping. No parent expects to lose a child before they die. The expected pattern of life is that the parents die in old age before their offspring. But we know all too well that is not always the case. It is gut wrenching for parents to bury their children.

In Jesus' day and time, a woman without a husband or a son was at the mercy of others for their charity and handouts. Any assets she may have had because of her husband's livelihood or inheritance became the property of her deceased husband's family once the son died. Using our 21st century values, this makes no sense. But this was not in the 21st century, and the cultural ways were very different.

Jesus saw her inconsolable anguish and weeping and was moved with compassion. There is a whole sermon right there. Jesus was moved with compassion. Jesus didn't ask, what did he die from? Jesus didn't ask, was he fully vaccinated and was he wearing a mask? He didn't ask if he stopped taking his medication or if he had missed his annual exam. Jesus didn't ask who sinned, and he didn't blame the mother or the son for making poor choices. He was moved with compassion by the suffering of this mother.

Let me also add, this mother didn't approach Jesus or ask him to intervene. She may not even have known who Jesus was. But Jesus saw her.

Jesus saw her and was filled with compassion.

Maybe it is just me, but compassion doesn't seem to be as readily available as it used to be. Blame and attack are prominent today, but compassion is in much shorter supply. I have been shocked at some school board meetings across the country regarding children wearing masks in school. Parents are yelling and threatening school board members. Where is the compassion? And I bet these parents consider themselves good upstanding Christians. I have been shocked at the physical threats to poll workers and election officials around the country when election results don't turn out as some predicted. Where is the compassion?

If we are to follow in the way of Jesus, we must move in this world with compassion. Jesus said to the mother, "Do not weep". Don't cry. But moving with compassion is not enough. The next step after compassion is action. We just can't feel sorry and then walk away. See something. Do something is the order of the day.

Theologian Gregory Anderson in *Love in Feasting on the Word*, wrote,

*If compassion meant merely inner sympathy, Jesus' statement to the mother would hardly seem kind. (It would be cruel) Jesus, however, has not just empathy but the power to change fate.*

Yes, Jesus had the power to do something. He chose to make a difference in this awful situation. He reached out to touch the bier the dead man was on. And by that very act, Jesus went against religious custom and became ritually unclean. Obviously, Jesus didn't care. He was willing to be shunned, cut off, or cast aside so this mother could have her son back—so this mom could have her life back. What was most important was care for this broken mother.

Friends, sometimes the rules we make for one another and ourselves have to be re-examined in light of what is needed at the moment. Was it this week that hundreds of people's baptisms were determined to be invalid because the words "we baptize" were used instead of "I baptize"? The Church said the word "I" needed to be used, because it is Jesus Christ who does the baptizing through the priest. I'm not demeaning anyone's faith tradition, but as I search the scriptures, I don't think Jesus ever baptized anyone. Make it make sense somebody!

All I'm saying is that sometimes our human made rules, cultural prejudices, and traditions get in the way of doing the right thing. When placed in a situation where we can make a difference, we may have to get our hands dirty to do the work of the gospel.

Feeling sorry about a situation while having the power to make a difference, and then choosing not to, is shallow and demeaning. We have power and agency to make this city a more livable place for all those living in the margins. We have the gifts and skills to move SFBC forward and be a beacon of love and hope for all God's people. For the sake of the gospel we cannot become paralyzed and do nothing, or wait for someone else to step up.

My friends, we have received God's mercy and compassion. God has stepped into our lives and brought life out of death, healing out of sickness, hope out of despair. God sees us when we are in need of a way out and a way through. God sees us when we are grieving the loss of loved ones and sees us when we are struggling to make sense out of chaos.

We may not have the nice neat tidy miracle that the woman in our text had with her son coming back to life. But we can rest assured that the Holy One sees us just as we are, and holds us in the hollow of her hand. There are miracles all around us, if we only had eyes to see them; ears to hear them; and a heart filled with gratitude and compassion to receive them.

Jesus stopped the funeral procession to bring life back to a dying situation. As we walk in the way of Jesus, embrace that sanctified power within you to bring life, and healing and hope to those around you. Holy Spirit use us as instruments of your peace and love. Give us courage to reach out with compassion and bring joy to your people. And all God's people said, amen!