

Sunday Lesson – Feb 7, 2021

GOSPEL: Luke 7: 1-17

Raising the Widow's Son

Summary

“Jesus travels to Nain, where his compassion for a grieving widow leads him to return her only son to life.” *(Excerpts from enterthebible.org)*



Insight

“Many aspects of this story direct readers' attention to the widow. Without a husband or any sons, she likely faces a dangerous and vulnerable future, because in her culture women usually relied upon male relatives for their social and economic well-being. In restoring her son, Jesus not only soothes her grief, he also restores her chances of surviving within society. There is no indication that the miracle has anything to do with anyone's faith; Jesus is motivated simply by compassion for a widow facing a future of jeopardy. Luke clearly crafts this episode to resemble the story of Elijah and the widow in Zarephath.” *(Excerpts from enterthebible.org)*

Gospel Reading

“When he finished speaking to the people, he entered Capernaum. A Roman captain there had a servant who was on his deathbed. He prized him highly and didn't want to lose him. When he heard Jesus was back, he sent leaders from the Jewish community asking him to come and heal his servant. They came to Jesus and urged him to do it, saying, “He deserves this. He loves our people. He even built our meeting place.” Jesus went with them. When he was still quite far from the house, the captain sent friends to tell him, “Master, you don't have to go to all this trouble. I'm not that good a person, you know. I'd be embarrassed for you to come to my house, even embarrassed to come to you in person. Just give the order and

my servant will get well. I'm a man under orders; I also give orders. I tell one soldier, ‘Go,’ and he goes; another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” Taken aback, Jesus addressed the accompanying crowd: “I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust anywhere in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know about God and how he works.” When the messengers got back home, they found the servant up and well. Not long after that, Jesus went to the village Nain. His disciples were with him, along with quite a large crowd. As they approached the village gate, they met a funeral procession—a woman's only son was being carried out for burial. And the mother was a widow. When Jesus saw her, his heart broke. He said to her, “Don't cry.” Then he went over and touched the coffin. The pallbearers stopped. He said, “Young man, I tell you: Get up.” The dead son sat up and began talking. Jesus presented him to his mother. They all realized they were in a place of holy mystery, that God was at work among them. They were quietly worshipful—and then noisily grateful, calling out among themselves, “God is back, looking to the needs of his people!” The news of Jesus spread all through the country.” *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

“The centurion of Luke 7:1-17 recognizes the power of words in general, identifying himself as one “set under authority.” When he says, “go,” or “come,” or “do this,” things are made to happen—someone comes, someone goes, or does something. He then looks to Jesus, knowing Jesus is set under an authority magnitudes beyond his own. Here, the centurion is tapping into the biblical emphasis on the power of the Word.

The psalms recognize the power of wicked words, and the damage they can do (Psalms 3:2; 27:12; 35), but also the blessings, particularly having to do with wisdom, that well-meaning words bring (Psalms 37:30; 49:3). The words that **we** speak have power too; power to harm or to heal, to create, to

order our lives, and to share the salvation that Paul wrote of. It may well be that our current cultural climate is crying out for just such a witness and just such a blessing.

Another striking element of this story is Jesus' reaction to the centurion. When Jesus hears that the centurion says, "Just say the word..." Jesus' response is recorded as follows:

"When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith'" (Luke 7:9).

Jesus is "amazed." That word "amazed" occurs relatively frequently in the New Testament, but is typically used to describe reactions **to** Jesus, not Jesus' reactions. In Luke the crowds are amazed because of or at Jesus.

In fact, only twice in the Gospels is Jesus amazed, and only here, in Luke 7:9, is that amazement positive. In Mark 6:6, Jesus is amazed at the unbelief and the outright rejection he experiences in his hometown. Here in Luke, Jesus is amazed precisely because of the faith of the centurion, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

What this story is trying to do is inspire just such a faith in us; faith in Jesus, faith that trusts that if Jesus says it, it is not simply promised, it **is**; it is accomplished. What would it look like for us to have such a faith? What would it make possible? Is there anything in our life that shows this forth? What, if anything, about our lives of faith would amaze Jesus?

One last word: notice that when it comes to amazement in Luke, it is, again, always related to speaking; first the announcement of the gospel according to the angel-host, and then the power of Jesus' words—in interpretation and understanding, and in controlling spirits and the elements.

As a whole, this story of the faith of the centurion, inspiring amazement in Jesus, has its roots in the centurion's amazement at Jesus. The one of whom the angels sang, and of whom the heavenly voice says, "This is my Son, the Beloved," is set under

an authority that can bring nothing other than amazement. The Word which spoke creation into order—"Let there be light!"—the same Word that stills the chaos of human life together—"Do not bear false witness! Do not commit adultery!"—is the same Word that can speak life to the dying, and even the dead.

"But only speak the word..." This statement of amazing faith is the product of a Word that first amazes. Let all who have ears to hear, listen." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by Karl Jacobson*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Mark 5: 22 & John 11: 1](#) *Two other resurrections*
- [1 Kings 17: 17-24](#) *Elijah and the widow of Zarephath—similarity to current story*

Thought for the Day

"We are the Bibles the world is reading; we are the creeds the world is needing; we are the sermons the world is heeding " ~ Billy Graham

A Prayer

Healing Lord, by your goodness you healed many who were ill, even raising the dead to life. Restore us to new life, healing our hearts, minds, and spirits, so that we may proclaim praise and gratitude for your compassion to all who will hear. In the name of the one who is himself new life, Jesus Christ our savior.

Amen