

TEXT: Luke 7:11-17

THEME: JESUS RUINS FUNERALS

Dear Christian Friends:

Did you know that Jesus ruined every funeral that he ever attended? Consider what we just heard. As Jesus approaches the city of Nain, he meets a funeral procession. Obviously, all of the funeral arrangements had been made. The dead young man was in his coffin. The pallbearers were leading the procession as they carried the young man out of the town. Behind the casket came the young man's grieving mother. She had no other family members to help and support her, so close friends were escorting her as she wept. And there were, no doubt, the professional mourners, people actually hired to weep and lament the death of this dear young man—you know, put everyone in the proper mood for mourning. They had all of their fine funeral arrangements made, and they were going out to finish the service by burying the young man in the family tomb. But Jesus comes along and ruins this perfectly good funeral!

Some time later Jesus ruined another funeral—the funeral of Jairus' daughter. When Jairus approached Jesus, he simply asked the Lord **“to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying” (Lk. 8:42)**. But before Jesus arrived, someone from Jairus' house came and told Jairus: **“Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more” (Lk. 8:49)**. You would think that Jesus would respect that. Now the family needed to make funeral arrangements. But Jesus loves to ruin funerals, and so he decided to ruin this one before it even began. When he arrived at Jairus' home, he took Peter, James, and John, and the girl's father and mother into the house. He told all the mourners not to weep because she was only sleeping, but they thought he was crazy. They knew that the girl was dead! Then Jesus took the girl by the hand and said, **“Child, arise” (Lk. 8:54)**, and she did. Jesus ruined this funeral before it even began!

And who can forget Lazarus! I mean he had had his funeral; he had been buried. Let him rest in peace! Let the family, especially sisters Mary and Martha, get on with their grieving. But no! Jesus insisted on raising Lazarus. Oh, sure, Martha and Mary believed that their brother would rise on the last day, but Jesus was talking about raising him now, four whole days after he had died. So Jesus wept and sighed and prayed, and then **“He cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’” (John 11:43)**. And when everyone saw Lazarus come out of the grave, they knew that his funeral was all in vain. Jesus ruins funerals!

So, Jesus went to three funerals, and he ruined every one of them. All three funerals ended in resurrection. I sure hope that Jesus comes to my funeral, don't you?

You see, dear saints, this is what makes Christian funerals different from any other kind of funeral. Jesus comes to meet death—your death and mine—head on. And when he collides with death, he conquers it, for you and for me. So, Christian funerals are not, as many people think, about celebrating the life of the deceased. No, Christian funerals are about the life of Jesus—the life that cannot be held by his cross or his grave, the life that energizes the whole world, the life that transforms you and me and refashions us into God's

image. Let's thank our gracious God that Jesus, his incarnate Son, comes to ruin our funerals, so that we can have life and fellowship with God.

Let's remember those three funerals that Jesus ruined. Remember how he raised Jairus' daughter. She was a young girl and barely dead. Remember how he raised the widow's son. He was a young man, providing for his mother. He had been dead only long enough to be prepared for his funeral but not yet buried. Remember how Jesus raised Lazarus. It's thought that he was an older man, and he had been dead four days. Not only was he already buried, but, as people thought in those days, he was beyond hope of resurrection. What does all this mean? No matter how young or old you are, no matter how long you may rest in the tomb, Jesus still comes to ruin your funeral and raise you to life with him. By his death he conquered death, and in his resurrection, he gives life for all to have and enjoy.

Now, this is very good news, because we live in a world plagued with death. Nine years ago death and destruction gripped our nation when terrorists attacked us on our own soil. Merely saying the words "September 11" brings to mind crumbling towers and 3000 dead. Five years ago Hurricane Katrina brought more death and destruction to our land, especially in and around New Orleans. We can't say "Katrina" without thinking of death in some form. And, of course, death hovers over our land in the holocaust called "legalized abortion." What a horrible specter! Let the story of Jesus raising the widow's son be your Easter hope in the midst of national death. You see, Jesus comes to ruin funerals; he comes to conquer death and give life; he comes to us who hate death because he hates death even more than we do.

But we don't have to wait until we remember September 11, or the tragedy of New Orleans, or even ponder the abortion holocaust to worry about death. Each of us already faces death every day. You see, death lives in us. It's what leads us to give in to our passions, those self-serving, sinful desires. It's what leads us to turn from God's merciful care. It's what leads us to do wrong to another person. The death that lives in us causes us to "look out for number one" in so many sinful ways. Yes, we all must face the death that lives in each of us, but we cannot conquer it; we cannot give ourselves life.

That's why Jesus comes to us, just as he came into the village of Nain. That's why Jesus stops not only our physical funeral processions, but also the processions of our daily attempts to give ourselves life. When Jesus says to the young man, "**Get up,**" he is also talking to you. He is raising you from the death of your sin. After all, you live in your Baptism. You've been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. That's where he truly stopped your funeral procession and ruined your funeral long before it happens. And remember this when you come to the Lord's Table today. When you eat and drink the Lord's Body and Blood, you consume Life itself. There's nothing better for ruining a good funeral than the Lord's Supper celebrated often and regularly. As you eat and drink, this day and every Divine Service, remember that Jesus is putting his eternal life into you. He is giving you his life so that you can love him and serve your neighbor. Even at this Altar, with this very Body and Blood, Jesus is already ruining your funeral. Yes, JESUS RUINS FUNERALS with life. If you believe that, say Amen!

Prayer of the Church— Pentecost 3C

Lord, when a loved one or friend dies, we mourn our loss. Our loss makes us lonely, at times critical, and sometimes even rebellious against you. Forgive us our sins. Increase our faith in Jesus Christ, who is the Resurrection and the Life. Thank you for sending your Son to ruin our funerals, by causing our death and burial to end in resurrection and life. As the wages of sin is death, so your gift is eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, our Savior, Jesus.

By your mercy, make our dying here become our entrance to life eternal with you. Since we are members of the body of Christ, we are certain that when we leave this world we will be reunited with our loved ones who have died in faith. We will live in your presence in heavenly joy. Give us the ability to reflect this conviction in our lives.

O Holy Spirit, you are our strength and comforter. Give us courage to carry on in our daily lives, dead to sin and alive to Christ. Keep us active in helping others. Supply all our needs of body and soul. Give us a faith that radiates joy and hope. We pray in your name, O God, in whom we live and move and have our being. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER