

12 October 2011  
Pentecost 17 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Lord of Life and Death”

Text: Luke 7:11-17; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Ephesians 3:13-21

If God is not the Lord of life and death, then He is not God at all.

We heard tonight of the widow of Zarephath, with whom the prophet Elijah was staying. For some time, flour and oil had been miraculously provided for her, but it was not until Elijah brought her son back from death did the widow believe and confess: ***Now I know you are a man of God!***

Then we heard of the widow of Nain and the mournful funeral procession that met Jesus as He was going into the city that day. After Jesus speaks to the young man and raises him to life again, the people exclaim: ***A great prophet has arisen among us! God has visited his people!***

They were right. But you and I know it was even more than that. God had not visited His people by means of another prophet, but had come Himself. The Son of God had come in human flesh to fight death and win.

For this is our greatest need. There is much we need for our everyday lives, and our gracious God gives us all these things. Sadly, we often take that for granted. And it is only when those things are taken away from us - our health fails, we don't know which way to turn, unexpected challenges and trials come our way - do we realize how good we've had it. How God has provided for us. How He has protected us all along.

But when faced with death, we are faced with the enemy that we cannot overcome. The enemy that, for us, is so final. That takes from us spouses, parents, children, and friends. Often suddenly, sometimes cruelly, but always so final.

But in Jesus, death has met its match. With Jesus, death is not the end, for *Jesus* is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. With Jesus, death does not have the last word, for *Jesus* is the Word of God made flesh; the Word of God which in the beginning created all things, and the Word of God which at the end will call all the dead to life again.

And so that day at Nain, Jesus gives us a foreshadowing of the last day, when at His Word, the parade of death will be stopped, the grave will be forced to release its

captives, and we will be raised to life again.

But it is a foreshadowing in another way as well. For in order to break the grip that death has on us, Jesus Himself must die. He must become the son of a grieving widow and be laid to rest in the grave. Yes, God must die that we may live. It shouldn't be, right? But that is because death shouldn't be. We were created to live, not die. Death is an intrusion on life. Death is the catastrophe brought into our world by sin. Death makes us what we were never meant to be and never meant to become.

A world which has no answer for death therefore tries to befriend death and convince itself that death is just a part of life. When faced with death, we wish we could have just a little more time with our loved one. But Jesus didn't come to give us just a little more time, but to give us eternity. He came, as St. Paul said, to give us **far more abundantly than all that we ask or think**. And so He enters the valley of the shadow of death with us, to bring us out the other side with Him. Death **takes** us, but it did not take Him. Jesus **gave** His life into death on the cross, that in His resurrection, He be the one who does the taking, taking from death its power and finality.

And so because of the cross and empty tomb, we can look at death a bit differently now. Just like those two widows and their two sons thought about death differently. Yes, they died, those widows and their sons, but not in the same way. For **God had visited His people**, so how could anything be the same? They knew death was not the end. They knew the one greater than death had come.

And He has come to you, too. In Holy Baptism He came to you and promised you life. For in those waters He joined you to Himself in His death and resurrection, that His victory and life be yours. That death now be simply the gate to heaven. Just like the gate we heard of today at Nain, when you will be the one carried through the gate only to meet Jesus on the other side, who will say to you, **Arise!** And you will. Never to die again.

For yes, our God is the Lord of life and death, and the life that He has prepared for you is far greater than all we could ask or imagine. And so as the weather grows cold and the leaves begin to fall and the world descends into the death of winter, how good it is to hear these words tonight! Words of hope, words of comfort, words of life. And to look forward to that day when what we now believe, will then be seen.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.