



The last three weeks we’ve been in a series of messages in the Gospel According to Luke where we are looking at what Jesus’ mission was, how he lived that out, and what it means for people who follow him. It’s all rooted in his identity as the Son of God, which we looked at in the first week. And then two weeks ago we saw that **Jesus’ mission is: to proclaim and even embody fulfillment, freedom, healing, and the favor of God here and now, today.** Then, last week we saw his invitation to some to follow him and be on this mission with him. It starts with the 12 Disciples, and many others beyond the 12; and 2,000 years later now includes about 2.4 billion people around the world who cling to the name of Jesus.

Today we see Jesus beginning to live into his mission. In fact, each sermon in the rest of the series will show us a different way that Jesus lived into his mission, or we could think of it as living into a different aspect of his mission.

So, I suppose if you were to ask people what Jesus is most known for, like what value of his most of the world thinks of when they think of Jesus, very high on the list would be “love.” **Jesus tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.** The second half of that is what most of the world knows about, with the first part – loving God – essentially discarded by most of the world.

Well, part of loving your neighbors as yourself is having compassion, and mercy, and being kind toward them, and so forth (need to be truth-tellers as well...but in a kind way). In today’s passage, we see Jesus doing exactly this. We are in a passage today that is oftentimes kind of overlooked. It is recorded only in Luke’s gospel. We are in Luke 7:11-17. We’re going to start with just **verse 11** and then we’ll continue on in a moment. This is God’s Word to you and me today...

Luke connects the events of these verses to the ones before when he writes, “Soon afterward...” We might wonder, therefore, what came

before? Whether you wonder it or not, I'm going to tell you because I think it's important to understand today's passage. Right before this, Jesus is in Capernaum, on the northern shore of Galilee. There, he heals the servant of a centurion. A centurion was an officer in the Roman military, who oversaw roughly 100 soldiers. Our word "century" has common roots with centurion. So, this is a guy with authority over people, which is communicated to Jesus in 7:8.

And as part of the military, he's probably pretty well off...maybe not "rich" but not poor, either, as he's working for the occupying government. Remember, Israel is under Roman rule at this time. So, he's with the "bad guys" from the Jewish perspective. But we see in those first few verses of 7 that he's also been a positive force in the community, helping to build their synagogue and even loves Israel. The main thing to take away from this, however, is that he's a guy with some status and authority in the community who has gained the respect of Jewish leaders there in Capernaum.

And Jesus heals this centurion's servant. Keep that in mind as we keep reading. So, "soon afterward" Jesus goes to Nain, along with his disciples and a large crowd. Nain (**map, red dot**) was a town about 25 miles southwest of Capernaum – a distance they would cover on foot in a day or maybe two at the most. Nain still exists to this day. For context, Jerusalem is about 60 miles to the south; The Mediterranean Sea is about 30 or 35 miles to the West. So, this is where Jesus is in today's passage. Let's keep reading (**Luke 7:12-13**).



So: As Jesus approaches Nain with the large crowd, another large crowd is just coming out of the town in a funeral procession. Modern archeological efforts have revealed an ancient graveyard just outside of Nain. It's almost certainly where they were headed. A mother, who is a widow, has lost her one and only son. And we see that Jesus has compassion toward her. "His heart went out to her" is how Luke puts it. And he says to her "Don't cry."

I don't know if you've ever told someone, or been told to, stop crying...but it's usually not very successful. At least, not immediately. Sure, eventually the tears stop. It would be a little odd if once we started crying about something we were never able to stop. So, of course, eventually she does. But still, Jesus' words at first might seem a bit cold or clueless. But we must not dismiss what Luke told us about Jesus just prior, that "his heart went out to her." His words are shaped by that compassion.

Sometimes when I've told my kids to stop crying, it wasn't with much care or compassion. Full confession here. I've definitely said it more as a command because I thought their tears were unnecessary and overdramatic. Just two days ago, on Hailey's 22nd birthday, our 7-year old was in tears when it came time to open gifts, because he hadn't gotten her a birthday gift. Everyone was in the living room for her to open gifts, and JD was in our bedroom in tears. I went in and asked him what the problem was. In a sad voice with tears in his eyes he said, "I didn't get Hailey a gift!" I then heard myself saying to him, "JD, stop crying. It's ok. No one expects a 7-year old go get a birthday gift for his sibling. You don't need to cry about this. Your other siblings didn't get her a gift. Mom and I got all the gifts, and they're from all of us. It's ok. Stop crying."

My words were *not* helpful. Eventually, he and I wrapped up a magnetic Seattle Mariner's baseball season calendar that had been on our fridge the last 6 months, and even after we'd wrapped it, he slipped in his own \$1 bill as part of the gift. But telling him not to cry really was not helpful, and my advice to you parents of young kids is: don't go that route. Fortunately, that's not Jesus' approach. He's not commanding her. Instead, he's full of compassion. His heart goes out to her. So: Imitate Jesus, not your pastor. Let's continue with **verse 14 to the end...**

I want to note the specific words that Luke uses to describe the deceased person. **In verse 12 and 15 he uses "nekros" which means a "dead person" or a "corpse."** We use it in English as well, as in necrology or necropsy or necrosis. So, "A dead person (nekros) was being carried out..." Then in verse 15, Luke returns to that word when he tells us that the "dead man (nekros) sat up and began to talk..."

But in between Jesus uses “young man” which is “neaniskos” in verse 14. It means just what it’s translated here: “young man.” There were other words for baby or child, which Luke uses in his gospel account, and there were other words for “older man” which Luke also uses. So, with this word that Jesus uses, we can deduce (not just from Luke or the rest of Scripture, but from all kinds of Greek writings from the time as well) that this is a young adult male – probably teens to late-twenties based on the word’s broader usage. Not an infant at a point in history where the infant mortality rate is believed to have been about 25-30% and the death rate for kids 10 and under was like 40-50%. Everyone experienced these deaths in their families and communities. It was that common. This is why life expectancy was so short in their time. If you made it to your teenage years, you actually had a really good chance of getting into your 50’s or 60’s at which point you’d be considered an old person. At age 52, I’m tempted to be offended at my own sermon, but that was just their reality.

So, in some ways this young man’s death is particularly grievous for this woman. Her son had made it through the most precarious stage of life and if he was about 20 years old, then there was every reason to believe he’d live another 30 or 40 years, maybe more. And since she’s a widow, her son would have been the primary person to provide for her and care for her. Besides losing the relationship (the most important part, of course), she’s also lost her provision. All of that has been taken away with this unexpected death.

But Jesus brings him back to life. Emphasizing this young man’s relationship with his mother, Luke highlights for us in verse 15 that Jesus “gave him back” to her. So, we see here that Jesus’ heart for her doesn’t end with compassion expressed in words, or facial expression, or a hug, or other expressions of compassion we might have toward people. His compassion takes the next step to be merciful toward her.

And the result is that the people are filled with awe and praised God. The word for “awe” is the word “phobos” from which we get “phobia” – arachnophobia, claustrophobia, and Marinerphobia...which is not the fear *of*

the Mariners by opposing teams, but the fear that all of us Mariner fans have that the Mariners will always disappoint us. So far, so good, this year, though. Anyway, phobos in Scripture usually conveys more of a “holy fear” or “awe” as we see here.

And that’s the response of the crowds. They’re not “afraid”; they’re in awe of what they’ve just witnessed, and they start saying things like “a great prophet has appeared among us” and “God has come to help his people,” and so forth, with that message beginning to be spread on first century versions of social media. **In other words: people spread this news about Jesus face-to-face with people they interacted with in real life.** As they said this, they likely recalled a couple Old Testament miracles that are similar, where the prophets Elisha and Elijah each are used by God to bring sons who have died, back to life.

So, there are three things to take away from this, I think. (An obvious one I’m not touching on today is Jesus’ lordship over life and death. We see that throughout his his ministry and especially in his own death and resurrection.) First, when you go back to the first 10 verses and compare and contrast that to verses 11-17, we see that **Jesus ministers to people regardless of their status in life. There’s no social barrier or human construct that will prevent Jesus from ministering to people.** We see this throughout his ministry: people of position and power, people who are of basically no status whatsoever; prostitutes, lepers, others who were marginalized, the young, the old...Jesus will interact with any of them, get to know them, meet their need, teach them, love them, hold up a mirror so they see the truth of their lives...I mean, Jesus does all of these kinds of things with all kinds of people, and we are called to do the same. No matter how different from us someone may be, even offensive to us, God calls us to treat them with respect and dignity.

Second, Jesus doesn’t just have compassion or sympathy for people, he has mercy. Biblically, sympathy and compassion are a little different than one another, but they’re certainly very closely related. Compassion is the emotion of pity or love for someone stirred up by that person’s suffering; Sympathy is to feel someone’s suffering – so a little more of an emotional engagement with them. (Empathy goes even further to feel the same way as

the one who is hurt...to feel it so deeply it's like the thing happened to you and leaves you not in a good place to help.) Both sympathy and compassion are used in Scripture with their own Greek words. But mercy starts there and then actually does something about the situation. **Mercy is compassion and sympathy put into action.**

So, if you know someone who has suffered some kind of loss – death of a loved one, or loss of a job or home, for instance – mercy would do something to help alleviate the situation. We might not be able to raise someone back from the dead, but we can pray with the grieving, or meet with them for coffee or a meal and just be a listening presence...or pass along job leads, or help them with networking connections, or offer temporary housing, or whatever might alleviate their pain and anguish in whatever their situation is, and let them know they're not alone.

And then: **Third, when ministry happens and mercy is extended, God is praised and glorified.** We see that in the response of the people, even if their claims that he's a prophet come up a bit short of his deeper identity; but as I mentioned, they're probably connecting the miracle they just witnessed to Elijah or Elisha, prophets from several hundred years earlier. But this proclamation of praise and glory for God is consistently the response people have to Jesus throughout the gospels. This is why you and I are created to begin with. Scripture tells us that all creation is created for God's glory. From the gazillions of stars in the sky to the mountains to the oceans to you and me and the microbiology of creation: it is all for God's glory.

And: **When we follow Jesus on this mission and live as he lived and minister to people blessing them and having mercy on them, we bring glory to God.** People around us will glorify him. It may not happen in that very moment like it did with Jesus if the people around us are not already believers. But *we* can glorify him when we see mercy extended; and *others* who are believers will glorify him as well when we extend mercy; and we hope and pray and believe that non-believers will come to a place of faith in Jesus to glorify God as well, because of the mercy we extend. Jesus teaches in Matthew 5 to “let your light shine before all people so that *others* may glorify your Father in Heaven.”

As we saw a couple weeks ago, Jesus came to proclaim release for the captives, sight to the blind and so forth. His proclamation, however, isn't just with words. It's not just that his "heart goes out" to people as he does with the woman here. He does something about it. He has mercy on them. **Mercy is a huge part of Jesus' ministry, all the way to the cross. And mercy is at the heart of our lives as well, when we follow Jesus because his mission is our mission.** As an example, in the last few weeks, our deacons here at Rose Hill have extended mercy in the way of financial support, to a number of people in our community who need help making ends meet. But it's not just our deacons; mercy isn't a just a component of some ministry structure in the church, and the rest of us don't do it ourselves. It's the call of each of us. We are each called to be merciful toward others, because it's one way Jesus lives into his mission.

So, let's extend mercy to people because God has first been merciful to us. Who in your circles of life needs compassion put to action? Maybe you are the answer, or part of the answer, to their prayers. Jesus' proclamation of "freedom to the captives" is true in our lives through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection; we've experienced his mercy. We are freed from sin and freed from eternal separation from God because of his mercy. If you've put your trust in Jesus, you've received his mercy. So, let's show Christ-like mercy to others as we live into the mission that Jesus establishes for himself and for us who are his disciples. Let's pray...Amen.