



Sermon – February 9, 2025

Luke 7:1-17, “What Are We Willing to Risk?” Our scripture today includes stories about two very different people. First, we have the Roman Centurion. Politically and socially powerful, he sends messengers to request healing on behalf of his servant. I imagine that, as someone with some power, he has exhausted every alternative avenue for healing—this is his last chance. He’s heard of Jesus, heard rumors floating around about a Jewish man walking around healing people and sees this as one final opportunity to have his slave be healed. He makes his request and before the messengers can even get home, the slave is healed. A miracle! I think that this part of the story is how we usually think of prayer functioning. We petition God for something, we ask others to join us in praying for something, and we wait and see what happens. I want to be clear—this is absolutely a way that prayer works, I just don’t think it is the only way. There is a reason that, in a few minutes, we will pray communally. There is a reason we have prayer lists—as a community of faith, we believe in the power of prayer to provide peace, comfort, and yes, even miracles. There is power in a community that holds each other in thought, word, and deed, that lifts one another up. But prayer of this kind, too often I think, requires us knowing what we need. This is where the second part of our Gospel reading comes in. The widow at Nain is different from the centurion in every way. She has no political or social power. She does not approach Jesus directly, or even send someone on her behalf, Jesus just happens upon the funeral. And, perhaps the key difference, is that in her case, her beloved son has already died. Past her last hope, when Jesus runs into the funeral procession, she doesn’t even ask him for help. She thinks she knows how this story will go, how the rest of her life will play out. She thinks she knows what the future holds. And then she runs into Jesus, and Jesus changes everything. Jesus meets her with compassion, not judgement or question. He sees her in her deepest grief and breathes new life into what was dead. This is the true power of Christ—the ability to bring back what was lost and the compassion to see people at their most vulnerable. These two stories of healing and resurrection, with wildly opposite people at their center, pull on a tension that I think our world often struggles with—the tension between ultimate power and ultimate compassion. Jesus is not the expected ruler the people anticipate—he does not come with political or social capital, he does not wield weapons, and he does not ingratiate himself with those who do. But we shouldn’t miss this—just because Christ hasn’t come with worldly power does not mean that Christ comes with no power at all. All the money in the world means nothing if you can’t defeat death, but because of Jesus we know that death has already been conquered. Death is overthrown, what once was lost, what was once so far gone that we had stopped hoping has been fully restored. These stories are reminders to me that a life of faith is not just one that depends on virtues and doing the right thing. They are reminders that God, conqueror of death, sees me and has compassion for me regardless of what I do. They are reminders that divine hope, that resurrection, will come even if I don’t get it all right. They are reminders that even when things in our lives seem too far gone, when all of our circumstances seem to be telling us to give up hope, that Jesus restores. They are reminders that nothing is ever too far away or too far gone for resurrection. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, when we ask for God’s kingdom to come and for earth to be as it is in heaven, these are not passive or trite requests. This is a call for resurrection, for the kind of redemption I think our world is in desperate need of. And it starts, as Jesus shows us, with acts of compassion. Compassion comes at the intersection of hope and crisis, when the source of all our hope runs headlong into deep and unshakeable grief. Compassion, Jesus shows us, is more than charity. Compassion requires movement—it requires getting out of our comfort zones, it requires sharing in the pain and suffering of those around us. Willing to engage with people at their most painful and vulnerable is what leads to real understanding. In a world that feels so deeply divided, I think it is worth asking what we are willing to risk—if we are going to risk vulnerability, risk being seen the way God sees us, risk opening ourselves up to the joys and pains of living as one of our hymns last week said. Jesus brings presence and compassion to a world that is deeply divided, sees us at our most pained, most grieving, and breathes new life into what was lost. Thanks be to God.

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