

"Two Parades" -- Luke 7:11-17

Memorial Service for James Noonan
April 22, 1997

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If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15)

Dear grieving members of James' family, his friends, neighbors, and co-workers, but especially you, Connie (his mother),

No doubt the simple question has been asked of God in the last week, "Why James? Why not some old man wasting away with cancer? Why James?" But no matter how many times we ask the question, we never really get an answer that satisfies. We are left with the truth that it has not been revealed to us, in the form of a written or verbal guarantee, or in any other way, just how many years of earthly life any one of us will have. Even Christians have no promise from God as to how long we will live on this earth. And, just as a week ago, not one of us here thought we would be congregated today for a memorial service for James, so also, no one here knows whether or not we will be gathered a week from today for a funeral service for me or for you.

Because we are not able to answer or understand the question, "Why James?" and since we are uncertain as to the number of days left to each one of us on this earth, so there is nowhere to turn for comfort, consolation, and hope except the Word of the Lord our God. Therefore, dear fellow travelers in this world, please listen to Luke 7:11-17 under the theme of ...

"... Two Parades."

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

Thus far the Word of God.

There were two big parades that day near the gates of the city called Nain. The one was the Parade of Life as Jesus walked into the city. The Master, Who taught both by His marvelous, life-giving words and by His amazing, life-sustaining deeds, led a large throng along the way. His disciples walked with Him and He was accompanied by a great crowd of people. At the gate of the city there was joy, life, and excitement in this royal procession for Jesus had, just the day before, healed a centurion's servant. Prior to that a leper had been cleansed at Jesus' Word. A paralytic rose up and walked, having been both healed and forgiven by the Son of God. Jesus had demonstrated the power and authority of His own Divine nature when He cast out demons on one occasion and helped bring in a full net of fish on another. Truly this Jesus was the center of attention in the Parade of Life.

But there was another parade that day and it was also a very large procession. It was the Parade of Death. A coffin was being carried by others as the Parade of Death wound through the streets of the city and headed for the gate to the graveyard in the world outside. The casket contained the body of a human being - someone so alive just hours earlier - someone old enough to be called a man - someone young enough that his mother was still living.

Do you see this mother walking in the Parade of Death? She is accompanying the casket of her son, her only son. This mother, grieving the death of her only son, knows the way of sorrow, for she has walked in the Parade of Death before. This woman knows the bitter tears of grief and the stunned gazes upon wooden coffins because, at a time prior to this, she accompanied the coffin of her husband. And when Jesus *came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.*

The two parades met at the gate of the city. What in the world happens when the Parade of Life meets the Parade of Death? Well, one must give way to the other. Jesus, the Author of Life, came into this world because every human being - each one of us here was in the Parade of Death, each of us was destined to take our respective turns at being carried in a coffin to an eternal destruction. That is what each one of us deserves. But God, Who desires not the death of anyone, sent His Son that we might have Life and have it abundantly.

So Life came into this world and was born in Bethlehem. Jesus was placed in a manger when God sent His only Son to be our Redeemer. Jesus lived for us, taught for us, prayed for us, and suffered on our behalf and in our place. Life met Death on the cross of Calvary when Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world, your sins and my sins included. So, dear people, God indeed knows exactly what it's like to have an only son die. Death appeared to have won when Jesus died and His lifeless Body was taken down from the awful tree and stuffed into a hole in the ground. But appearances are deceiving and the earth quaked again, hours later, when, on Easter morning, Christ rose from the dead, demonstrating victory over death and a complete payment for all our sins. What Good News! The Parade of Life continues and the Parade of Death need not be the end.

The widow whose only son had just died found that out the day the two parades met at the gate of the city of Nain. What would happen when these two columns met? One would have to give way to the other. Would it be Jesus stepping aside, or would the grieving woman who lost both husband and her only son have to give way once more? *When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."* Do you hear what Jesus said to the dead man? *"Arise!"* God gave His Word and with His Word is the authority and the power to make it so. Jesus grants the Word that enables one to be taken from the Parade of Death and be joined with Him

in the Parade of Life. In August, 1965, in Roy, Utah that took place for James when he was baptized. James received all the blessings and benefits that Christ earned on the cross and guaranteed on Easter morning. James belonged to Jesus then and belongs to Jesus now.

And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Jesus presented the young man to his mother. What a beautiful passage that is. Following the man's resurrection from the dead, the Lord presents him to his mother.

We are also told of two others whom Jesus raised from the dead during the days prior to His own Death and Resurrection. There was the daughter of Jairus and, as you heard in the Gospel reading earlier, there was a friend named Lazarus. Like the widow's son in the city of Nain, they were both relatively young people who had died. Jesus brought both of them back to life. These episodes demonstrate that He has the power to raise the dead. The Lord did not say He would raise all the dead before the Last Day. He raised some to show that He could and to give us hope on days like this, in order that we may anticipate and be confident that the Lord will present all Christian sons to their Christian mothers on that wonderful Day of the Resurrection.

Surely on this day, a word needs to be said concerning body and soul. One of the agonies that we face is that James' body has not, to date, been recovered. Certainly we hope and pray that it will; so that closure may take place. However, in these matters of body and soul, the Word of God is also a comfort to us. Solomon writes that at death *the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit (or soul) returns to God Who gave it (Eccl. 12)*. Therefore, we should be reminded that we do not have souls. We are souls. We are not bodies who have souls; rather, we are souls who have bodies. This is immensely important.

Both of the thieves who were crucified with Jesus were among those in the Parade of Death. One of the thieves repented of his sin, confessed Jesus as the Christ, and petitioned the Lord of Life, *Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom (Luke 23)*. The Suffering Savior spoke those beautiful Words of truth from the cross to that repentant thief, *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise*. Dear thief, though this day your body will die, you - the real you that you really are - *today you will be with Me in Paradise*. Dear thief, though your body will be taken down and buried in an unmarked grave, *today you will be with Me in Paradise*. Dear Christian, though your body may be lost at sea or completely incinerated in a fire so that your loved ones might never be able to have a graveside committal service, "fear not," says Jesus, *"today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

Even that is not the end of the comforting message of God for you this day, dear people. For the Lord God Almighty, the One Who created you in the first place, will, on the great and wonderful Day of the Resurrection, raise up the bodies of all and reunite them with their souls. Is He Who first *formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of Life (Genesis 2)*, capable of reassembling us on the last day and reuniting body and soul, no matter how difficult the task might seem to us? Yes, indeed, for this is God we are talking about. This is the One Who stopped the Parade of Death that day in the city of Nain - when He had compassion on the widow who has lost her only son and said, *"Do not weep."* Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, *"Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.*

It is no wonder that fear - true, proper, Godly fear, *came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.*

Dear people, the Parade of Death stopped that day because there was absolutely no reason for it to continue. The Parade of Life was joined by the woman and her only son. People were amazed and the account of this event in the city of Nain went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region. Why, the report of this episode went even further, crossing geographic boundaries of space and spanning the centuries of time. In fact, the Good News of Jesus and this resurrection of the mother's only son even came at an unscheduled time and to unplanned place where a certain number of grieving people gathered for a memorial service for James Noonan.

Dear people, you have two parades before you this day - the Parade of Death and the Parade of Life. James was in the Parade of Life and, as a result, is with the Lord in Paradise. In which parade are you presently traveling - the one that leads to death in the graveyard of this world and the lake of fire in eternity, or, the parade led by the Lord of eternal Life which leads to the Paradise of God? It is an immensely important question for you to consider because your response has eternal consequences. Amen.