

Luke 7:11-17

They had had funerals before...many times; but this one was different. This one was a real tragedy. There was great sadness all over town when they heard that he had died. He was young; but even worse, his mother now was all alone, for he was her only son and she was a widow. The people of Nain wept with her. There was little else they could do. They went with her for the funeral procession. They dropped whatever else they were doing so they could be there for her in her time of sorrow. They knew what was going to happen. Every funeral was the same. They would walk out the gate of the city until they would come to the burial site. There they would lay his body to rest. No one was expecting the unexpected.

Meanwhile, a few miles away, a crowd has gathered. They're following Jesus. They have come to admire Him and be awed by Him. They have seen Him heal many sick people. They have watched Him drive out many demons. They have heard Him teach and preach. They have been amazed by Him. And so they follow...some because they love Him... others because they hate Him and they are looking for a way to catch Him in a trap. Many follow out of curiosity. They want to see more miracles...hear more amazing things. But that day, not even they were expecting the unexpected.

It was not unusual to see a funeral procession leaving the city. It was not unusual for a group of people to be walking towards the city. But when these two crowds of people met face to face, that's when the usual came to an end and the unusual began. The unexpected was about to happen.

The first thing to happen which was unexpected is that Jesus spoke to the grieving mother. Perhaps that, by itself, was not so unusual, but what He said was. "Do not weep," He told her. He might have said, "I'm so sorry," or "God be with you in your loss." That would have been the usual thing to say; but, "Do not weep"? That was unexpected. So is what happened next—He touched the coffin. This was not a sympathetic touch; a touch of understanding sorrow. That's what we might do today. But Jesus touched it with authority. His touch brought the pallbearers to a halt. That was very unusual. What happened next was even more unusual. He spoke to the corpse. And what He said was most unexpected..."Young man, I say to you, Arise!"

Everyone was watching in amazement. Everything happening was so unusual—one thing after another. It was better than a circus sideshow. Normal people just didn't act this way. They didn't do the things Jesus was doing. Even the crowd following Him was surely wondering. They had seen Him heal the sick and drive out demons. But the dead? They had never seen Him raise the dead before.

Everything happening was so unexpected, yet no one was prepared for what would happen next. The most unusual...the most unexpected thing that could have happened—happened. The dead man sat up. At Jesus' command, he became alive. He began to speak, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. That day in the town of Nain, although no one was expecting it, the unexpected happened.

There are some similarities between the town of Nain and the town of Augusta, and all the towns around us. One similarity is that we, the people who live here, are much like the

people who lived there. We, like them, live life one day at a time. We go to work. We go to school. We eat meals together with our family. We converse with our neighbors about current events. We go to weddings, and yes, we attend funerals. We're similar also in that we, like them, really don't expect the unexpected. Some of us may have purchased a lottery ticket or two when the payout was in the hundreds of millions. But...we really didn't expect to win. When couples in Augusta give birth, they expect to see one or two babies—not six. And when we have funerals, we don't expect the one in the coffin to sit up and begin talking.

We are similar to the people of Nain in one other way—Jesus has also come to our town—not walking down the road in front of a crowd of people, but coming to us, into our hearts and lives through Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and through His spoken Word. And He comes to us for the very same reason He came to the people of Nain—to free us from the power of sin, death, and hell. The people of Nain learned something that day—something that we would do well to learn: When Jesus comes to town, you need to start expecting the unexpected.

But is that why we're here today? Perhaps our attitude can be summed up by the woman I heard last week who said, "I really enjoy going to Saturday evening church...that way, you can get it out of the way." Whenever we come to God's House, do we see it as something to "get out of the way" so we can do what we really want to do? Or do we come expecting to receive from God the treasures we can get nowhere else? Were the people of Nain glad to get Jesus' visit over with? Was that mother put out because Jesus interrupted her busy schedule that day by bringing the funeral procession to a halt? They had no complaints in Nain that day, did they? And we wouldn't either if we realized that Jesus comes here in Word and Sacrament each week to prevent Satan from carrying us into hell on the coffin of our wretched sinfulness. Jesus doesn't come here each week to interrupt your busy schedule. He comes here to interrupt the devil's wicked plan to bury your soul in eternal death.

But that's not our expectation. We see church as something we do for God. But really, we should see it in the light of this story. Whenever we come here, Jesus is once again face to face with that funeral procession. Only you and I are the ones in the coffin. And as His life-giving Word is preached and His Sacraments are given, He is, once more, looking death square in the face—our death. And He is stopping that procession in its tracks. And His Word of Forgiveness to you is giving you life just as He gave life to the young man from Nain.

But if that was our expectation, then we would never miss the opportunity to be here on Sunday mornings, would we? So it's obvious that we expect from God something far less than the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. And it's obvious that we don't expect much from His Word, or our Bible Classes would be full, and we would gladly read, hear and learn it.

The good news for you is that Jesus gives us His gifts even though we don't expect them. No one in Nain was expecting Him to raise the widow's son that day. But He raised him anyway. And even if we're not expecting much from God here today, He is giving you His gifts of salvation anyway. You see, He does something for you which would seem, to most people, to be quite unusual. In your baptism, when your sins were carrying you away in

death, Jesus stood before you in the water and said to you, “Arise!” He lifted you out of the coffin of your sins. He gave you life. And He gave you to your mother, the Church. And then He did something most unexpected—He laid down in the coffin in your place, and He died your death. The sins which were carrying you away carried Jesus to Calvary. And there He was nailed to your coffin. There His Father punished Him for your sins. There Jesus suffered hell in your place. And then, three days later, He rose from that death so that He can come here to Augusta, Missouri and give you real life.

And that’s just what He does. Even if you’re not expecting Him to, God forgives you—each one of you—right here and now. His body and blood for you is the sure sign and seal of this forgiveness. His Word of Absolution to you does what it says—it makes you clean of your sins. Even if you expect less than this; even if you expect to be punished for what you have done—God, for Jesus’ sake—forgives you. There is no punishment for you. God has no anger toward you...no hostility. Jesus took your place on the coffin of the cross. He died for you. You are forgiven.

And so you can go now into your Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday and live the life Jesus gives you. You don’t have to lie back down in that coffin anymore. You can leave your life of sin. Jesus buried that coffin for you. You can live now in Jesus Christ because He lives in you. And you can look forward with hope and joy to next week when Jesus will again come here for you. Remember, as the people of Nain surely did, that because Jesus is here—you can and you should always expect the unexpected. Amen.