

The Original Ghostbuster

[Text - Luke 7:11-17]

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In this morning's New Testament reading we have an intriguing story about how Jesus literally stops the funeral procession of a young man, by calling him back to Life. And though it may remind us of some modern-day Sci-Fi movie, the intent of this story isn't to frighten us, or to fascinate us. It's to assure us that our Divine Creator genuinely cares about us at every stage of our lives, and even beyond! This story is perfect for today's Christian Education celebration, because it reveals the essence of what the Christian Faith teaches us: that in Jesus Christ we see the fulness of a Divine Love that is boundless. When Jesus sees that grieving mother, he is "moved with compassion" for her and says to her, "Do not weep." Then he says to her *dead* son, "Young man, rise up!" The man sits-up, and begins to speak; and Jesus gives him back to his mother.

This is a spellbinding story, which would be even more intriguing if we knew what that young man said when he came back to life; but we're not told that. What we *are* told, seems rather self-evident: "Great fear seized them all!" No kidding! Seeing someone presumably dead suddenly come back to life, would tend to have that effect. Of course this isn't something that many of us -if any of us - have ever seen, or will see; which can make this story seems so alien to our own experience that it's easy to simply dismiss it as being interesting, but irrelevant. However, I think there's something about this narrative that can actually speak deeply to our own lives. You and I may never see a funeral being interrupted like that; yet we can find ourselves being called back to Life in ways that are similar. The key issue for us to consider, therefore, isn't *whether* or *how* this particular incident could occur; but rather *what* might this story mean for you and me today.

I imagine that many of us experienced had a time in our lives when, though not physically dead, we have felt physically depleted or emotionally defeated. It may have been a time of severe illness,

intense physical pain or profound mental distress - some situation so devastating that it made our lives seem completely hopeless and helpless. I'm sure the widow in this morning's story felt that way. It's painful enough to bury one's own parents, but to lose one's own child - one's *only* child - must be one of Life's most devastating blows. And while those grief-stricken parents may have no desire to go-on, the fact is Life *does* go-on. That's why it's essential to try to find some thread of hope to grab hold of, while walking through that deepest valley of utter despair. That's also why it's important to realize that somehow, from the depths of the most severe pain and loss, there can still arise the astonishing possibility of experiencing courage and compassion, restoration and renewal of Life. The Life Story of Jesus Christ teaches us that even the most terrible times of fear and despair, death and destruction can be overcome by the greater power of Divine hope and help, life and love.

When you and I look-back on those times when our own lives seemed lost and hopeless, we can also reflect on how we made it through those situations, and emerged perhaps even stronger. Realizing just how fragile and fleeting Life can be, sometimes helps us appreciate what a wonderful gift Life truly is. Facing the fact that the mortality rate of the human race is 100% can sometimes give us the push we need to fully embrace and cherish the time and opportunities we have. I imagine that after Jesus returned that young man to his mother their relationship would have been infused with a whole new sense of love and appreciation, closeness and joy. There's nothing quite like recovering something we thought was lost, to help us recognize its genuine value! And the Good News is, we don't have to wait until Life is slipping-away, in order to fully embrace it and make the most of it.

Today and every day, you and I can graciously share the Gift of Life in many marvelous ways - through our Strengthen the Church offerings, or other charitable contributions that help restore people's hopes and lives. We can share the gifts of food and hospitality through our Hunger Meals - offering encouragement to those who struggle every day just to make ends meet. We can be more aware of the impact [positive or negative] that our words and actions have on those around

us - and strive to be more intentionally Life-affirming. I can say without a doubt, that our Church's intentional welcome to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people is a true life-saver! Having gone through the life-draining experience of being rejected by the denomination of my birth, and then reconnecting with a Church that openly welcomed and affirmed me, was very much like experiencing a rebirth and receiving a new lease on Life!

This congregation's deliberate outreach to the LGBT community is a tangible sign of our commitment to following the Life-affirming Way of Jesus Christ. Jesus lives, and dies, for the sake of doing good: healing the sick, feeding the hungry, lifting-up the oppressed, and welcoming the outcast. He proclaims and embodies the marvelous message of a Divine Love and Grace that never ends! Today, as the Body of Christ, you and I can continue to bring new life and hope to all people. And while we may not be able to raise the dead, we can definitely raise our level of dedication to offering compassion, hope and joy to every person we meet - every day of our lives.