

Luke 7:11-17

April 8, 2016

Funeral of Alex Dumschat

- we are faced with two challenges today
 - how can we as family and friends bring comfort to a beloved family in the midst of unimagined sorrow?
 - how can God bring light and hope to a day filled with darkness and despair?
- when Reinhard first phoned me last Friday with the news of Alex' death, my reaction was immediate
 - this is unimaginable ... how can anyone get their head around this?
- sure, we all face difficulties and trials in this life, sickness and sorrow
 - my wife and I waited through six hours of brain surgery for our daughter
 - we've been through an emergency C-section and open heart surgery and cancer ... twice
 - we've buried parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles
 - but nothing prepares you for this
 - this is unimaginable
 - the first platitude I'm *not* going to share with you is that I know how you feel ... I can't imagine how you feel
 - I only know how I feel, and I feel terrible
- there are some things that would be very easy to do today
 - it would be easy to feel sorry for ourselves and for each other
 - it would be easy to feel guilty for all the things we might have done to prevent that terrible day last week
 - it would be easy to beat ourselves up over all the should have's and could have's

- it would be easy to ask all those questions we want to ask when stuff like this happens ... questions like ...
 - if there is a God who cares about us, why didn't he do something?
 - why doesn't God intervene when tragedy is on the horizon?
 - why doesn't he keep trouble away?
 - is he angry with me?
 - did I do something wrong?

- when we struggle for answers and there don't seem to be any answers, it's easy to listen to the answers that the world has
 - you've heard them before
 - maybe you even believe some of them
 - maybe you've even said them to someone at some time or another, thinking that it might make them feel better

- it's easy to say that there is no God
- it's easy to say that those religious people are sadly deluded
 - it's easy to say that there is a God, but he can't fix everything
 - or this one ... there is a God, but he won't help you
 - he really doesn't care

- dear friends, don't settle for the easy answers
- on a day like today, don't let the world deceive you
 - there is a God who can help
 - there is a God who does care
- there is a God who actually did something about all those things in our lives that tear us apart
 - long ago, when God saw the brokenness and mess that our world was in, he planned a rescue mission
 - and when the time was right he put it into motion

- “in the fullness of time... that is, when the right time came ... God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law”
 - I know, that’s preacher talk ... that’s church language
 - what does it mean in English?
- it means that God knows that this world is not the beautiful place he intended it to be
 - this world is filled with sickness, tragedy ... war, hunger ... mental challenges, addictions, untimely death
- he could have simply abandoned us to our fate to hurt and suffer and die, or he could do something about it

- so which did he choose ... where is God ... if you want the answer to the question that will give you hope, here it is... “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting our sins against us”
 - the answer to hopelessness, to despair, to suffering, to the reign of death ... is Jesus

- I picked one of Jesus’ miracles from Luke 7 to share with you today, because what we need, more than anything else on a day like today is a miracle that will give us hope and light in the face of the darkness of death
 - you need to know that there is a God who hurts along with you and who can help you when death tears your heart out
- here’s the scene ... Jesus is coming into the town in the midst of a festive and joyous parade ... he’s the Grand Marshall of this here celebration
 - he has just healed a Roman soldier’s servant who was near death
 - and he actually did it by long distance
 - now Jesus and his followers are headed off to another town and on the way they met a different kind of parade
 - talk about taking the wind out of your sails

-it's a funeral procession of the saddest type ... a young man,
the only son of a widow was being carried out to be laid to
rest in the grave next to his father

-God, how could you do that!

-you're not fair ... you could have prevented this ... why didn't you
do something?

-it's easy to lay to rest one of God's children at the end of a long and
blessed life

-most times a funeral service is for someone 80 or 90 years old ...
sometimes even 100

-those faithful saints have spent years praising God and
praying for his church

-they've spent their life in dedicated service to their Saviour

-when the Lord calls them home, the family and the church gather to
rejoice that Jesus has welcomed another one of his own home to
heaven ... beautiful

-funerals like that are a joyful time

... but where's the rejoicing today?

-today we lay to rest one of God's children called home too soon and too
young

-Alex is one of God's children who struggled a lot with life and was
challenged more than we can imagine

-you've prayed for an end to the heartaches ... for deliverance

-today there is a small sense of relief, still it is overshadowed by guilt

-we wanted the turmoil to be over, but not this way

-we'd gladly take more of the turmoil if we could only have
Alex back a while longer

- today we all want to know why, but God doesn't always tell us why
 - God does tell us that he loves us
- he tells us that his Son Jesus came to give us all another chance at life
 - he tells us that on the cross Jesus died that we might live
 - and he tells us that the ultimate message of hope comes from the day Jesus rose from the dead
 - that is what today is all about

- what do you want today ... what do you really want?
 - I know what I want ... I know what I need more than anything else
 - I need someone strong enough to take on the neighbourhood bully that we call death and put him in his place

- that is what happened that day on the outskirts of a town called Nain
 - there's this woman leading a stream of mourners
 - she's a widow and this is ... this *was* her only son
 - parents aren't supposed to have to bury their children but in this broken world it happens time and again
 - the bully we call death has won another fight and claimed another poor victim

- and you might be convinced that God doesn't care, but he does care more than you can imagine
 - just look at what happened that day on the streets of Nain when the parade of life and the cortege of death met
- the first thing you need to see is how Jesus was filled with compassion for her
 - our English language suffers here
 - we say Jesus was broken hearted
 - we say his heart went out to her
 - in Greek, the seat of the emotions isn't your heart, it's your gut
 - what is it that churns and aches deep inside you during those awful times in your life?

-it's not your heart, it's your gut

-Jesus ached for her ... she was already a widow ... now childless too

-what havoc sin has wrought in God's once perfect creation

-this isn't the way it was supposed to be

-sickness, sadness, grief ... fruits of evil

-anger, hatred, worry ... fruits of our brokenness

-and then the bully we call death

-God looks down from heaven and says, "Enough!"

-this cannot go on ... someone has to take on this bully called death

-my creation, my people, my dear ones suffer too much!

-I must find a way to put an end to death, once and for all

-so there on the streets of Nain, a fight breaks out between two rival gangs

-death and life ... darkness and light ... good and evil ... Jesus and

Satan

-on the streets of Nain that day life won, and darkness got a bloody nose,

-the young man was raised back to life and Jesus gave him back to

his mother

-the people were filled with awe and praised God

-a great prophet has appeared

-God has come to help his people ...and the news spread far and wide

-Jesus cared enough to raise the dead and to dry a mother's tears

-how they must have rejoiced that day!

-but, as they say, it ain't over until it's over ...death would not give up

-he would be back ... he is back ... he comes back for us all

-evil, darkness, death ... they still stalk us all

-we try and pretend that evil isn't so bad

-we get used to living in the darkness

-we put off death as long as we can

-but sooner or later death will find us ... then what?

- I want to let you in on a secret ... well it's not really a secret, but it stands at the heart of why we are gathered here in a church today
 - as sad as today is and as unimaginable as it is when one of your children dies, for a Christian, death is not the end, death is the doorway to everlasting life
 - death sets us free ... and here's how
- St. Paul has something to say to us today:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- when we carried in Alex's remains earlier today we covered them with a white cloth we call a pall
 - let me explain why ... 24 years ago Cathy and Reinhard carried their third newborn into God's church
 - another little sinner had been born
- you heard me right ... we're all born that way ... broken ... bad
 - they dressed Alex in white, not because he was some kind of little angel, but because in a few minutes the pastor would put water on Alex' little head and baptize him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
 - in that moment, Alex was born again, all his sins were washed away and he was covered by the absolute perfectness of Jesus his Saviour

- now, today, 24 years later, that quality persists and Alex stands before God still covered in the absolute perfectness of Jesus his Saviour'
- here's what you need to know ...
- when death comes and claims you and you stand at the gates of heaven and someone wants to know why you should get in, all your good intentions and all your efforts to make yourself look good won't really count
 - here's the only thing that does count ... does Jesus' absolute perfectness still cover you?
 - do you trust in him to break the bully's power and give you eternal life?
- our heavenly Father cared enough to send his only Son to die for us
 - to carry our sins away to the cross and die in our place
 - to rise from the dead on the third day to break the bully's power
 - to overcome the grave and open the way to new life
- Reinhard and Cathy, Eric, Mark and Katie, your family has been afflicted with terrible sadness
 - you grieve, but not as those who have no hope
 - you know that for Alex, pain is not the last word
 - the last word is relief
 - illness and depression and other disorders that affect so many people are not the last word either
 - the last word is healing
 - in the face of darkness, the last word is light
 - in the face of death, the last word is life
- that is the promise of God to which we all cling
 - it is what gives us hope
 - it helps us to weep and rejoice at the same time

- you know who you can lean on during these days
 - there are people praying for you that you don't even know
 - you have friends and extended family who are here for you today and the days ahead

- one Scripture reading you chose for today comes from Philippians 4:7:
 - the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

- there's another one of those church words ... transcends
 - here's what it means
 - every part of our reason and intellect wants to be at war with God today
 - we want to know why and how
 - but God doesn't give us an answer ... instead he comes to us in his Word of promise to put his loving arms around us and hug us with his love
 - the peace of God ... that's what you have
 - whether we understand everything that happens in our lives or not, we have an irrational confidence that God's love is there for us whether we can see it or not
 - we trust that all things work together for good for those who love him
 - we trust that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord

- and when the storms of life threaten to overwhelm us, we are reminded of the Bible verse that is Alex' confirmation verse, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" ... Amen

- now may the peace of God which really does defy our efforts to understand it, keep you in his grace unto life everlasting ... Amen