

Synopsis

Title: El Roi – The God Who Sees

Theme: God saw the affliction of his people and visited through Jesus to destroy the power of death

Call to Action: As members of God's community, we have been given the sight of Christ, his compassion, and the power to offer words of life to the hurting and broken around us.

Primary Text: Luke 7:11-17

Secondary Texts: 1 Kings 17:17-24; Genesis 16:7-14

Hymn: SDA181 – Does Jesus Care?

(http://www.hymnary.org/text/does_jesus_care_when_my_heart_is_pained)

Sermon

"How would Jesus top himself?" was the unspoken question at the top of the minds of everyone.

Just a few days ago Jesus had miraculously healed the servant of a Centurion in the lakeside town of Capernaum. Prior to this healing, Jesus had been in the physical presence of the ones needing healing. But with the servant, Jesus had spoken from a distance, never seeing the servant.

A great crowd consisting of curious onlookers, the skeptical, and disciples followed after Jesus to see what wonder he would do next. From Capernaum Jesus travelled south, past Nazareth, and toward the town of Nain, crowd in tow.

As the group led by Jesus approached the gate of the town he looked up and saw a commotion. He saw a large crowd coming out of the town, led by a woman in mourning, followed by a bier holding a body, carried by several bearers. Around and behind were many men and women of the town, wailing and crying loudly. This was obviously a funeral procession, carrying a dead person outside the town to be buried.

Two large crowds. One heading toward the town, led by the source of healing and life. The other coming out of the town, led by death and despair. Luke seems to set the scene using imagery of two armies coming forward to do battle. A battle between Life vs. death.

The crowd following Jesus only sees a funeral procession. As he moves forward, so does the crowd. They expect him to join the funeral procession, as tradition dictates, and follow the townsfolk to the burial site.

But Jesus sees beyond what others see on the surface. Jesus sees a widow whose only son's lifeless body is now being carried out. If the widow has no other family to return to, or if the family won't take her back, she will have no means to support herself aside from begging or prostitution. Underneath the obvious sorrow, Jesus sees the fear and anxiety that this woman feels.

Jesus walks up to the widow. He stops. He looks at her. She looks back. She sees kindness. She sees compassion. She is grateful that this stranger would stop to take notice. But she doesn't expect any more than that. She is alone in this world now, just a nameless woman, left to fend for herself.

The crowd behind her continues to wail and weep. And then Jesus does the first unexpected thing. He says to the woman, but also loud enough for those behind her to hear, "Do not weep." Those

immediately behind the woman abruptly stop their noises and the silence quickly ripples back. The widow looks at Jesus, startled and confused.

“Do not weep?” Why shouldn’t they weep? This man is dead. Jesus’ disciples and all following him are silent as they puzzle over Jesus’ words.

But before they have time to really process what Jesus has just said, Jesus moves again, toward the bier. And then he stops right next to it. He begins to reach for it. Those who can see Jesus watch the next moments unfold in slow motion. This rabbi, a holy person, slowly reaches out and touches this object that is unclean and defiled with death. A look of horror crosses their faces. Gasps of shock echo through the crowd.

Life touches death. The clean touches the unclean. The holy touches the defiled.

The laws of Moses clearly state that when something or someone comes into contact with the unclean, the defiled, the dead, that too, becomes unclean and begins the journey towards death until it undergoes rituals of purification to return it to cleanliness and holiness. Surely Jesus knows this...

Before the people have time to truly think through the implications, Jesus speaks to the dead man, “Young man, I say to you arise.” The people’s thought processes are abruptly interrupted again with this third, unexpected action. The man is dead! No one has been returned from the dead since the times of... since when? Since the time of Elijah and Elisha! Who does Jesus think he is? Who is he?

The widow, the mother, looks with shock upon Jesus, her eyes move to the bier, then to the body, her expression desperately trying to hide any signs of hope, lest they be dashed. Then the body begins to move. Joy creeps into her face. The man sits up. Joy and relief rush over the mother’s face.

The man sees his mother. Sees Jesus. Sees the crowd immediately in front of him. He notices that he is sitting on a bier. He is confused. “What am I doing here?” he asks in puzzlement.

The bearers lower the bier. Jesus reaches out to take the man’s hand and helps him up. He hands the man to his mother. Just like in the story of Elijah, the widow and her son of Zarephath.

Awe and amazement descend upon the entire crowd. For a moment they are speechless as they look at Jesus, the man and his mother, and back to Jesus. They think back to Elijah and to the prophecy of Moses that a great prophet will arise. They begin to understand and exclaim, “A great prophet has arisen among us!”

They think back to their stories where divine agents came to visit people in their afflictions. They think about Hagar, the one who when sent away into the wilderness, alone, encountered a divine being who saved her life. She called God “El Roi” meaning “God who sees” because God saw her affliction and came to save her.

They recall Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Samson’s parents, and Samuel—all who encountered divine agents. They think about the promises that God will remember his people once more. And then it dawns on them what has just happened. Together they exclaim, “God has visited his people!” God has seen their sorrows and afflictions, and has shown compassion to them through Jesus.

The funeral is abandoned. Wailing turns into laughter. Tears of sorrow transformed into tears of joy.

Death cannot harm Life. The unclean cannot contaminate the clean. The defiled cannot defile the holy.

Instead Life transforms death. The clean cleanses the unclean. The holy sanctifies the defiled.

This is the good news. This is the gospel.

Luke concludes this story by writing, "And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country."

Does Jesus Care (key of C, melody begins with G)

1 Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?

Refrain:

Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.

2 Does Jesus care when my way is dark
With a nameless dread and fear?
As the daylight fades into deep night shades,
Does He care enough to be near? [Refrain]

4 Does Jesus care when I've said "goodbye"
To the dearest on earth to me,
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks—
Is it aught to Him? Does He see? [Refrain]

El Roi, the God who sees. He continues to see the afflictions and sorrows of his people. Jesus is not literally and physically present with us now, but we together are his body. We are the spiritual embodiment of Jesus in the world today.

In our daily walks and journeys of life, what do we see around us? When we look into the faces of people around us what do we see?

(Excerpted from *Kathy Escobar* at <http://kathyesobar.com/2013/06/05/everyones-fighting-some-kind-of-battle/>)

[We look at people around us and for the vast majority of them, from what we see we assume things are going well for them.]

but the truth is, every human being—every human being—is fighting some kind of battle.

addictions to drugs, alcohol, porn, work, food, unhealthy relationships, gambling, spending.

mental illnesses

chronic pain

the fall out of painful divorces

cutting and self-harm

struggling children

caring for ailing parents

past abortions

cancer

legal troubles

longing for a child, a spouse

shame, shame, and more shame

eating disorders

the trauma of sexual abuse

the deep wounding of physical and emotional abuse

confusing sexuality

hurting marriages

shattered dreams

broken relationships

death of a spouse of a kid of a friend of a family member

loss of jobs

debilitating fear

homelessness

near homelessness

being bullied

insecurity & unworthiness

church woundedness

financial distress

pressure to succeed

you name it, someone's struggling with it.

it's probably the guy at the grocery store or your neighbor or the woman you are standing next to at a soccer game or your mom or your dad or your kid or the person on the pew next to you or the one with the microphone or the one opening the bible or the one with big letters behind their name on their business card or the one holding a sign on the street corner or the one writing you a ticket or the one annoying the hell out of you for some weird reason or the one teaching your kids or the one fixing your car or the one you are sitting next to on the bus or the one standing in line in front of you at social services or the one who just came out as gay or the blogger who just wrote something that pissed you off or the one who signs your paychecks or the one who leads your small group or the one who stumbles out of the bar drunk or the one who keeps posting irritating things on facebook or the one picking up the bag at the food bank or the one paying for their groceries or the one smiling as they walk across the basketball court in a gold dress and wave to the crowd.

yep, everyone's fighting some kind of battle.

God, give us eyes to see beyond what's on the surface.

give us ears to listen beyond what we hear.

help us learn to live without assuming, without judging. give us hearts filled with compassion because of our shared humanity, our shared experience, our shared trying-to-make-it-through-the-day-as-best-we-can-despite-the-obstacles, our shared desire to be known and loved and accepted not for what's on the outside but for what's on the inside, too.

no less-than, no better-than.

no less-than, no better-than.

let's be kinder than necessary. everyone's fighting some kind of battle.

Jesus sees. Jesus cares. Jesus sends us out to continue his work of compassion.

Analysis

Table 1: My organization of the text and its motifs

Luke 7:11-17 (ESV)		Activity Summary	Motifs
1	11 Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain,	Intro -- Jesus goes to Nain	Intro
2	and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.	Accompanying Jesus Jesus approaches town See! A dead man coming out of town Only son, woman widowed Accompanying man/widow	Setting Introduces life vs. death Jesus sees
3	13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."	Widow - Jesus sees - compassion Jesus says	Jesus sees - his motivation Jesus is compassionate
4	14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.	Jesus touches death Death stops Jesus speaks No longer dead -- Alive Jesus gives to widow	Confrontation Life victorious over death Jesus is compassionate Words give life Jesus takes on death to offer life
5	16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"	Crowd's reaction - fear Crowd's response - praise Reason for fear Reason for praise -- compassion	People's response "God is compassionate"
6	17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.	Conclusion -- Report about Jesus spreads	Conclusion

At the Surface: Jesus sees. Jesus is compassionate. Life is victorious over death.

Theology: God's compassion compelled Jesus to take on death and defeat it in order to offer life to all.

Application: To see, to be moved by compassion, and to offer words of life to the hurting and broken around us.