

## The Triangle of Hope (Easter)

Luke 7:11-17

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

For our Easter Sunday service, Pastor Scott weaved the world-changing impact of Jesus rising from the dead with a prelude to that event in Luke 7, which is full of theological significance.

In verses 11 through 17, Jesus enters the town of Nain — along with the usual crowd following him — and encounters a funeral procession. Simply put, the only son of a widow has died, and Jesus has compassion on the grieving mother and raises her son from the dead.

Besides the parallel of resurrection — the widow's son and Jesus' rising to come — Pastor Scott pointed out that the Greek term for "only son" in this passage is the same term for Jesus as God's "only son." Pastor Scott pointed out another parallel: This widow had a serious problem before Jesus intervened — the fact that there is no longer any man in her life to provide for her. As a result, she's destitute — in real trouble.

In the same way, humanity had (and of course, still has in many ways) a huge problem before Jesus' sacrifice for us — sin. Because of sin, we're in real trouble. Sin equals death. In one crucial sense, eternal death after our lives are over due to the personal sin of every single human being, which separates every single human being from God who is perfect and holy.

But in addition to that, our lives on earth are marred and negatively affected by sin — again, our own personal sin that messes up our lives, but also others' sin that affects us negatively. What's more, sin shattered God's perfect creation, and as a result we live in a broken world and are negatively affected through disease and disasters and other overarching problems that can touch anyone at any time.

However, despite our sin, God had compassion on all of us by sending Jesus to pay the penalty for our sin on the cross and then rise again from the dead on that first Easter morning. God's compassion is demonstrated — as Pastor Scott pointed out — in Christ's stirring account in the Prodigal Son parable during which the wayward child comes to his senses and returns to his father's house in repentance with the offer to work for him as a servant. But instead of sternly looking down his nose at his son, the father runs to meet him, embraces him, and puts a feast together in celebration!

Can you picture God loving you in this raw, unrestrained manner? Forgiving you instantly and then demonstrating lavish love, far beyond anything you expect or could hope for? It's not always easy for many of us to relate to this view of God — a lot of times because our own fathers fell well short of the father in Jesus' parable. But we have to ask the Lord to help us see him in this way! Pastor Scott importantly noted to us that God wants to “restore us to something different.”

Indeed, Pastor Scott also reminded us of God's “bio” from Psalm 145 — “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” — and that he sees our challenges and wants to care for us. Pastor Scott also emphasized God's love for us as described by Jesus in his Sermon on Mount: “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26)

Pastor Scott then challenged us. Every day — more like minute by minute! — when we're tempted to sin, we have a choice to make between Jesus and the thief. And Jesus spells out in John 10:10 what that looks like: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

Are we going to continue giving in to the temptations of Satan, who wants nothing more than to steal our peace ... our joy ... our relationships? Or will we ask the Lord to help us turn to him when we're tempted, so that he can give us abundant lives — in the here and now?

As Pastor Scott offered, those of us who have not yet embraced the promise of Christianity can do so NOW. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” How do we believe in him? A great way to start is through prayer, which is simply talking to God like you talk to a trusted friend. You can tell God you know you're a sinner, that you're sorry for your sins, and that you accept Jesus' sacrifice for your sins and trust him for your salvation — and the abundant life here and now he offers. The Lord is waiting to run to meet us with open arms, embrace us as his adopted children, and to begin the celebration!

But as with the Prodigal Son, we first have to come to our senses and go to the Lord in repentance. “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)

God has provided the one and only path to him through Jesus — and if you haven't come home yet, you can do so right now.

It's your move.