

Trinity 16  
Jesus' Word Conquers Sin and Death  
Luke 7:11-17  
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Make no mistake about it, Jesus indeed felt compassion on this widow from the town Nain and he showed to her such mercy that neither she nor her son forgot it for the rest of their lives. Yet, as we consider that there were many more widows and mothers, who had lost their sons in Israel at that time and still today, you might wonder why Jesus chose to raise this son of this widow. No doubt, Jesus loved this particular widow, but he did not perform this miracle for her sake alone, but for the sake of many people, who would believe in him through it. The Holy Trinity orchestrated this event, so that these two great crowds, that which followed Jesus and that which followed the bereaved widow and her dead son, converged to witness this demonstration of Jesus' powerful word. And as a result, many spread the news of Jesus and many believed in him.

And for a similar reason, the Holy Spirit caused St. Luke to record this very event, so that you too might hear it and believe that Christ Jesus exercises power over sin and death through his *word*. It is the word of the Lord, which conquers death. And we need to know how to conquer death just as much as those two crowds did.

The widow from our Old Testament lesson sobbed at Elijah, "You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" And she was certainly on to something there. Death brings remembrance of sins. This is because death is the result of sin. St. Paul writes, "The wages of sins is death." (Romans 6:23) and "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." (Romans 5:12) Therefore, death is the greatest visible reminder of sin.

Now, if we are by nature sinful (meaning we have inherited our sinful condition from our fathers), that means that by nature we are spiritually dead! St. Paul writes in Ephesians 2, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." *Dead!* Spiritually dead! What can the dead do to help themselves? Could the young man wrapped in death cloths, his body cold and stiff, make an effort to come

back to life? No! It was Jesus' decision to raise him from the dead. It was the power of Jesus' word, which enlivened his soul. It was Jesus' work, not the work of the dead man. And so, if you are *spiritually dead*, then you can only be made alive by the will and working of God. And that is exactly how you are given spiritual life, St. Paul writes three verses later," But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved."

If you are *spiritually dead* then you can only be saved by *grace*. Grace does not involve any of your works, otherwise it would not be grace. God made you alive when you were dead. And Jesus has demonstrated for all of us that he makes the dead alive through the power of his word.

And so, it is remarkable the resistance that stands against the power of Baptism to save. The main objection to the teaching that Baptism saves (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21), is that only faith saves and Baptism is a work. Now it is true that only faith saves, for Scripture says, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace." And it is also true that Baptism is a work, but it is not *our* work. Baptism is God's work.

So, let's start from the beginning. What is Baptism? Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word. You see Baptism is not just a sprinkling of water. It's no ordinary bath. Neither is this *just* water alone, otherwise it wouldn't be a Baptism. This is water joined with God's powerful word! And what have we learned about the Word of God? It is powerful enough to raise the dead!

Baptism is pure grace, because in Baptism sinners are saved apart from their own works through the power of God's Word. This is why St. Paul writes in Titus chapter 3, "He saved us, not by works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Baptism is not your work. If it were, it would only be an imperfect work with no power to save. But Scripture says that Baptism saves all who believe (Mark 16:16).

Many are offended that Lutherans baptize babies, because babies can't make a decision or confess their faith. Perhaps they're also offended that Jesus didn't ask the dead man if he wanted to be raised from

the dead. But babies are not less capable to receive God's grace than adults. In fact, Jesus says, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Mark 10:15)

Those who reject infant Baptism give too much credit to physical birth. Physical birth can never give you the kingdom of heaven. "That which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of Spirit is spirit," Jesus says. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" Here Jesus goes even further than saying that you must become like a child. He says you must become like a fetus, yes, completely redo your birth! No, not physically, but spiritually. You may have been born a healthy baby, but everyone enters the world as a spiritual stillborn. You are born *dead* in your trespasses. That is why Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of *water* and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

And so, Baptism is a new birth of water and the Holy Spirit, who is breathed out through the speaking of Jesus' powerful word. In Baptism, you receive the birth your mother couldn't give you, one of the Spirit, which gives eternal life. In Baptism, Jesus speaks and the spiritually dead is raised. And just as Jesus then gave the young man he rose from the dead to his mother, so he places all baptized children into the care of their mother, the church, who continues to nurture them with Jesus' word and Sacrament.

Sin and death are inextricably joined together. You can't conquer death without conquering sin and you can't conquer sin without conquering death. This means that when Jesus raised this young man from the dead, or whenever he raised a person from the dead, he forgave his sins. This means that Baptism too is a lavish washing away of sins.

And Jesus' word conquers sin and death throughout your life as well. The dead man was being carried to his tomb, where he would be locked up for as long as the earth remains. And so, many, who have fallen into sin, into spiritual death, are carried by their sinful desires into unbelief and ultimately damnation and eternal death. And here too Jesus' words are powerful to save. He calls such sinners to repentance. And he forgives them with the breath of his mouth. Before they can be laid in the tomb of death forever, the Gospel gives them new life. And this is why we should never give up. Those, whom we love, who are caught in sin and unbelief can be turned to faith by the power of God's Word. Before the grave devours them forever, Jesus can save them.

Jesus had compassion. And this is more than just a sad feeling we all get when we go to a funeral. Jesus actually felt her pain. More than that, he felt her sins which his death reminded her of. More than that, he felt the young man's sins. And still more, he felt this young man's death.

This is how God visited his people: he took on our human flesh, so that he could sympathize with our weakness. Although he never sinned, he felt the burden and guilt of our sin. And although he did nothing deserving of death, he experienced death and the punishments of hell on the cross. This is how God visits his people. This is what it means that he had *compassion*.

And likewise, God visits his people today through his word. Because the great message of God's Word is that he sent his Son to bear our burdens, to be punished in our place, to devour death, so that it cannot devour us. That is what Jesus' word communicates in the Gospel. That is why it is so powerful, because it is true. Baptism can join you to Jesus death and resurrection, because Jesus truly did die and rise for you. Baptism washes away your sins, because Christ's blood provides the flood to do so. Jesus is able to command us to live forever, because he truly sucked the poison out of the sting of death by removing our sins from us. Where there is no sin, there can be no death.

Fear seized them all. That seems strange. Why would you be afraid of him, who did such a great deed? But it is not that they were terrified of some evil that Jesus would do or frightened of a ghost or zombie. Rather, they had been overcome with a childlike fear. God is in their presence! And he has demonstrated his power. This inspired awe from the crowd that no earthly father can instill in his children. And with such a holy fear comes an earnest trust. Childlike fear of one's father is a fear that trusts in one's father.

And so, we too should have such a childlike fear of our God. After all, he has come to visit us with his most powerful word. We should be at awe at the power performed in our Baptism and every time we receive the forgiveness of sins. And we should earnestly desire to hear, read, and learn this powerful word. And above all, we should trust in it. When your conscience burdens you by the wicked thoughts you've had, let the remembrance of your Baptism give you confidence that your sins are forgiven. Trust that the body and shed blood, which you receive in the Sacrament will do what they set out to do. Trust in the words

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of forgiveness I speak, not as coming from me, but from him, who commands the dead to rise and they listen.

And this is the only comfort you will find as you face death head on. When your last hour draws nigh, your sins will try to scare you into spiritual death. But godly fear, which trusts in God's word will give you confidence. The words of Jesus will give you comfort in your death and confidence to lie down and sleep. You will awaken again as surely as Jesus has spoken, "Your sins are forgiven." Amen.