

**+ Luke 7:11-17 + God Has Come to Help His People +  
+ Third Sunday after Pentecost: Festival of Friendship + 13 June 2010 +**

Sometimes you just need some help. A little one gets a hard bump from trying stairs for the first time. A student struggles with her homework. A man gets injured while working out in the yard. A woman has difficulty walking after a surgery. A family struggles with their finances and keeping their home. I'm sure you could come up with countless other examples. The truth is, for as independent as we want to be and whether we want to admit it or not, you and I can't get through life without help.

Even so, when we do get the help we need, it fills us with relief, comfort, assurance, even joy. The bruised little one is comforted when mommy kisses his owie and gives him a hug. The struggling student is relieved when her homework is finally finished with a little help. The injured man gets assurance from the immediate medical care he receives from a quick-thinking family member and the medical personnel at the emergency room. The loving support of family and friends brings joyful relief to the struggling woman or the struggling family. How wonderful to have a loved one who always seems to be there to help, but even the best friend or the best help in this life can't be guaranteed 100% of the time. The help you need isn't always available when you need it. Such times leave us disappointed and maybe even asking ourselves, "What if...?", if help doesn't arrive.

I wonder if that's what a widow from a village called Nain was wondering as the body of her son was carried out of town to be buried. The sad, sorrowful journey out to the cemetery was familiar to this woman, who had already lost her husband to death. Since then, her son was all she had left, but eventually death took him too. It was a heartbreaking scene as the people of Nain formed a large crowd behind the widow as she made the long, lonely walk to the cemetery behind the men carrying her son's coffin. It was especially heartbreaking, because in spite of the crowd, this woman was really left helpless with no support and an uncertain future. It shouldn't surprise us if she wondered "What if...?" as she trudged out of the village.

Little did that grieving mother realize, but help was on the way. About 25 miles to the northeast in a seaside city called Capernaum, a teacher named Jesus was causing quite a stir. His teaching had an authority about it unlike any other teacher of the Law and he backed up that teaching with miracles. With a simple command, Jesus had driven out demons and healed countless people of countless diseases, including leprosy and paralysis. Recently he had healed the servant of a Roman centurion, a military officer, with a simple command without ever meeting the servant. In the meantime, large crowds followed him wherever he went hanging on his every word. "Who is this Jesus?", people wondered, "Why is he here?"

There's no way to know if the widow of Nain had ever heard of Jesus, but soon she would never forget him. After healing the centurion's servant, Jesus, his disciples, and a large crowd traveled down to Nain. As he approached the town gate, suddenly the heartbreaking scene stretched out before them. Low songs of mourning filled the air. Men from the town carried an open-air coffin on their shoulders. Behind the coffin followed the young man's mother—bitterly weeping and alone with a large crowd behind her.

As God himself, Jesus knew she was a widow and the grief she endured. Jesus knew the lifeless young man in the coffin was once her only son. He knew how helpless she was and it broke his heart. **"When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'"** Literally, his "gut moved", his stomach turned over at this sad situation. Oh, how death had ruined his beloved creation and his love for that grieving soul moved him to action. Filled with the comfort that only the Lord of life can give, Jesus told her, **"Don't cry."** Now that woman had every right to grieve. Her husband and only son were dead. She would be helpless for the rest of her life with no one to care for her, but the Lord wasn't just patting her on the back and trying to dry her tears. Jesus had come to bring her the help she needed.

Surely Jesus' words of comfort caught the grieving mother by surprise, but that was nothing compared to what Jesus was about to do with the still-moving coffin. **"He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still."** That action was pretty significant. You see, God had commanded his Old Testament people that anyone who touches something or someone dead or the coffin that bore them would be considered ceremonially unclean and unable to worship in the temple. Soon that wouldn't matter though, because Jesus was the Lord of life. **"He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk..."**

Imagine that! What was dead was now alive. One does not ordinarily speak such words to a corpse, but Jesus was no ordinary man. He is the God of heaven and earth, the Lord of life and even death itself, who later described himself, **"I am the resurrection and the life."** Since this was a command from God himself, the young man sat up, not a zombie, but a living human being who began to talk. Then Jesus, the Lord of life, gave

the widowed mother the sweet relief and assurance and comfort and joy she so desperately needed. **“Jesus gave him back to his mother.”**

The crowds were filled with awestruck fear, but soon praised God for what they had seen and heard. **“A great prophet has appeared among us...”** **“God has come to help his people.”** Literally, “God has come with the express purpose of helping and caring for his people.” Help like no other had arrived and this news about Jesus spread far and wide.

**“God has come to help his people.”** The widowed mother came to realize what that meant as the Lord gave her son back to her. So often in our lives it seems to take a wake-up call like that for us to realize how much help we really need. You and I live in a society where independence is valued and the person who can pull himself up by his bootstraps is highly regarded. Who of us ever really wants to ask for help, even during times when we know we need it? That’s the way we look at our spiritual lives too. In every one of us is this desire, this thinking that somehow I have to be the one to make myself right with God even in the slightest. “I can do it myself,” we think.

...But then God gives us a wake-up call. A loved one gets sick unexpectedly. You find yourself lying in a hospital bed. You get a pink slip from your company. The car breaks down and the mortgage and utility and credit card bills come in. Work, school, and life suddenly crank up the stress at home. Your relationship with your spouse hits an all-time low, as does your relationship with your kids. Suffering or sorrow or grief comes into your life. Temptations that you just can’t shake keep chasing you, while others even worse aren’t far behind. The memory of sins past torments you. Fear and uncertainty for the future become all too real, while the shadow of death haunts you and your loved ones. Whether or not you admit it, you need help.

You’re not going to find it in anyone or anything in this life. Beloved friends and family pass away or fail to be there when you need them. The stuff you own eventually breaks down or wears out. Your status in life, your job situation, your health, all of that eventually changes. Disappointment fills your life and that lingering, gnawing question, “What if...” haunts you. Soon you realize you’re on your own, you’re really, truly helpless.

At times like that, the help you need can only be found in one place—your beloved best friend, Jesus Christ. Remember what the people said after Jesus raised that young man? **“God has come to help his people”**. God only comes to help his people because he loves them more than we can imagine. You saw that love of the Savior move him to help that widow. That same love moved Jesus to do even more! He continued to preach good news of sins forgiven, of eternal life secured, of salvation won. He continued to heal the sick, feed thousands, calm storms, raise the dead, and live a perfect life in his every thought, every word, and every action, but that’s not all. That love that helped the widow became even more evident years later when Jesus made his way to a low hill outside of Jerusalem bearing the burden of all your sin and death beneath a cross. There you see that love as Jesus himself was nailed to the cross allowing his holy blood to be shed to pay for your sins and dying in your place. Then you see that love most evident in another cemetery, where a borrowed tomb stood empty of its occupant three days after his death. You see that love in the living Lord Jesus and you see **“God has come to help his people.”** There in Jesus, your best Friend, you find the help you need always when you need it.

You and I are absolutely helpless on our own, but out of love for you, your God has come to help you today and always! In love he longs to help you. In love he speaks to you through his holy Word. In love he pours out his blessings from his cross and empty tomb even in the midst of suffering and struggle and hardship. In love he calms your quaking heart with his peace. He wipes away your guilt with his forgiveness. He dries your tears with the comfort of eternal life in heaven, and he enables you to live a life that shares the help he has given you. After all, **“God has come to help his people”**! What better news can you share with those you know and love? What better reason to live each day as husband or wife or single person, father or mother or child, sibling or friend, neighbor or co-worker or classmate because of the help your God has given you in your Friend, Jesus Christ? What better reason to say “No” to temptation and to depend on your gracious God always! May you never forget that as you lean on your Helper and find relief and assurance and comfort and joy in Jesus that will last for eternity, because your **“God has come to help his people.”** Amen.