

**+ Luke 7:11-17 + Can Jesus Help Me? + 3rd Sunday after Pentecost + 14 June 2015 +**

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the seas.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

H.E.L.P.—four simple letters, but a concept every person learns from little on. At every stage of life, we need help. An infant needs help being fed or changed. A toddler needs help going down the stairs or getting unstuck. A child needs help riding a bike or getting a toy just out of reach. A teen needs help with homework or learning how to drive a car. As adults, we need help with all kinds of things—doing a job, raising a family, using technology, keeping physically fit. The older we get, the more we realize we need help from others...even if we don't want to admit it.

Last week we talked about trust, specifically trusting Jesus to do what he has promised. Well, trust and help are so closely related that they practically go hand-in-hand. To get the help you need, you have to trust that a person or group of people will help you. A child has to trust her parents to help her. A teen needs to trust that he has his father's support. A husband and wife need to know that they will both be there for each other. If help isn't there from the parent or spouse or classmate or co-worker, it could be disastrous. The results could be the same if you can't or don't trust someone to help.

Sometimes the help you and I need isn't just physical help, but spiritual. As sinful human beings living in a sinful world, it's not unusual to face situations where we need more than physical help. A loved one dies and you face grief and loss and everything else that follows in death's wake. You get a paycut or layoffs loom at work or you simply have trouble getting the work you need to pay the bills. So worry and anxiety start to creep into your thoughts. You're diagnosed with a chronic or terminal illness that will plague you for the rest of your life. Suddenly you're faced with fear and uncertainty about the future. Things seem to pile up one on top of the other as everything gets worse. A dark cloud of hopelessness drifts into your life. In every case, you need help, but where will you find it?

You can look to friends and family and they will support you, but is their help going to be enough? No, but there is One who can help, whose help is always more than enough, but sometimes even as Christians, you and I have trouble trusting that he will. **WILL JESUS HELP ME?**

In the Gospel Lesson, Luke describes a woman who really, truly needed help. We don't know her name, but hers was a sad story. The Lord had richly blessed her with a loving husband and then blessed their marriage with a son. They were a small, yet happy family living near the town of Nain about 20+ miles from the Sea of Galilee. They wondered if perhaps someday the Lord would bless them with a bigger family, but God had other plans. The woman's husband died leaving her a widow with their only son.

It was difficult to be a widow in Jesus' time. Few jobs were available for women at that time. So like other widows, this woman had to depend on her son to support her. He was just old enough to have a job that would bring income into their home. It was a tough life, but the Lord was blessing them, that is, until something tragic happened. Perhaps it was an illness. Perhaps it was an accident. Luke doesn't tell us, but he does tell us that the widow suddenly found herself alone with no family, no son, and no help at all.

As they had done for her husband, the mother and her friends prepared her son's body for burial. It doesn't take much to imagine how the tears flowed. The funeral had to happen soon thereafter since the body had to be buried right away. Men from the town served as pallbearers slowly carrying the body on something like a stretcher through the streets of Nain. The grieving mother and her few friends followed behind weeping and wailing, as was the custom. It was such a tragic scene that many in the town followed the procession as it made its way out to the cemetery. People wondered, "What would happen to this widow now that her son was gone? Who would help her? Who would support her and feed her and keep her safe?" No one knew. She definitely didn't know. Her friends could only do so much. Life looked pretty bleak as grief and loss and fear and uncertainty and worry and anxiety and hopelessness piled up on her.

Little did she realize, but help was on the way. Shortly after healing the centurion's servant, Jesus left Capernaum for the town of Nain. It's likely that his disciples and the large crowd of followers and gawkers didn't know why they were going 20+ miles to Nain. It wasn't an important city like Jerusalem and we don't hear about it anywhere else in the New Testament, but Jesus had to go there because a grieving widow needed his help.

...But how did he know? It's not like there was a Bat-Signal shining in the night sky summoning Jesus from Capernaum. There was no social media. It's not like the widow could post her need for help on Facebook or tweet it on Twitter or send out a mass text message. She couldn't even call anyone for help on the phone. So how did Jesus know? He is the all-knowing and merciful God, and he knew she needed help.

Jesus' timing, of course, was perfect. He and his disciples and that large crowd of followers arrived outside the town gate just as the sad funeral procession began winding its way out of Nain. Jesus knew why he had to be there, but it was still a tragic scene and **"when the Lord saw [the widowed mother], his heart went out to her..."** His heart filled with sadness because of what death had done once again to his beloved humanity, but compassionate love and mercy overtook that sadness. Literally, "his gut turned over with pity and sympathy." He knew what that mother had gone through and he knew what she was enduring now. He knew what help she needed. So his compassionate love moved him to give her that help.

As the procession slowly made its way toward the cemetery, the mother broke down again crying. Jesus with tears in his eyes came up to her and said, **"Don't cry."** Easy words to say, easy words that only offer so much comfort as a loved one is about to be laid to rest, but these weren't empty words that Jesus was using to dry a tear or two. No, they were a glimpse of what was about to happen, a glimpse of his help that would dry all her tears.

Jesus **"went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still."** The procession suddenly came to a stop and would never start again. With large crowds on both sides of the coffin right out in the most public of spaces, Jesus helped the widowed mother. He simply said to the corpse in the coffin, **"Young man, I say to you, get up."** Everyone caught their breath as they saw the dead man actually sit up and begin to talk. His cause of death—wounds or illness or whatever—was gone. He was healthy. He was actually alive, **"and Jesus gave him back to his mother."** Her tears of grief and hopelessness became tears of joy and hope.

Everyone was speechless, not knowing what to say. **"They were all filled with awe..."** In the end, all they could do was praise God. **"A great prophet has appeared among us...God has come to help his people."** The One who had helped this grieving mother was more than just a prophet, because even death immediately obeyed his word, but yes, God had **"come to help his people"** with the help only he could give.

Jesus mercifully helped this woman in her darkest hour, in her most desperate time of need, but will Jesus help you? Even as Christians, we do wonder sometimes. Our funeral processions don't get stopped along the way, but make it all the way to the cemetery where the body of another loved one, another friend is placed in the ground. Job layoffs and paycuts and difficulty finding work still happen. Chronic or terminal illness still plagues you. It might ease up or go into remission, but it's still there. Grief and worry and fear and hopelessness still linger in Christian hearts like yours and mine.

On top of all that, there's still the reality of sin and guilt. Right along with the question, "Will Jesus help me?", you might ask the question, "Do I deserve to have him help me?" The answer to that question is a resounding "NO!" You and I sin every day. Every one of us falls short of the perfection, the holiness that God demands in his holy Law. None of us are perfect enough to deserve any blessing, any help from the hand of our God. It's not just because we fall short, but because every one of us is by nature, a rebel, an enemy, a hater of God to be numbered among the walking dead in sin, deserving of nothing more than God's righteous condemnation in hell.

Yet the same could be said about the widowed mother whom Jesus helped. She was a sinner too, deserving death because of sin just as much as her son and every one of us sitting here. Yet the Lord still helped her, and he has helped you too. As he did with the widow, Jesus doesn't just help with easy words, but with action. He saw your pitiful condition. He knew how sin plagues your life in every way, shape, and form. He knew you needed help, so his compassionate love moved him to act. This Lord who faced death outside of Nain is the same One who faced your death with his own death on a cross. This Lord who raised the dead with a word is the same One who was raised to life on Easter morning. This Lord who gave the son back to his mother is the same One who gave you life and has given you life eternal.

This same Lord helps you even now. He helps you as he dries your tears with the certainty of the resurrection. If that loved one was also a believer in Christ, Jesus assures you of not only a blessed reunion in heaven, but above all, an eternity spent together with your Savior. When you're faced with loss, he helps you as he restores you from his own fullness, not only working all things for your good, but also providing with his more-than-sufficient grace and mercy. When you're faced with illness, he helps you as he provides his own strength in your weakness. When grief and worry and fear and hopelessness start piling up, he helps you as he takes

all that off of your heart and mind and places it on his own almighty shoulders, always providing the help you need, even if you don't expect it.

This same Lord will help you too. You don't know what the future holds. I don't either. As we grow up, as we get older, as we realize that we need more help both physically and spiritually, our Savior who raised the dead comes to our aid. He knows what challenges and blessings lay before you, and he knows how he's going to help you. He will be there helping and supporting you until he brings you to be with him in the glories of heaven.

In the end, not only has Jesus proven that you can trust him, but that you also can be absolutely sure he will help you in every time of need. When he does, may those praise-filled words of the people be on your lips—***“God has come to help his people”***, even you and me. Amen.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.