

Luke 7:11-17

Galatians 1:11-24

5.6.16

Morning Praise

St Matthew's

From Death to Life – Turning things around

Compassion

How do we understand compassion?

Expressions of sympathy, love, care. Someone entering into a difficult situation with you. A hug. – all comforting and lovely, but sometimes it's the practical help even with really mundane things which can make the biggest difference. (*story of an offer to mow lawn at a difficult time in life*) Compassion does mean feeling pity or sorrow for someone who is hurt or suffering difficulty, but I think it also involves *action*: doing something about it. Think of compassion as a verb, something to do. (Empathy plus action)

In our Gospel reading today, it's this 'doing something about it' kind of compassion that really jumps out in what Jesus does.

Jesus is travelling from Capernaum where he has just healed the Centurion's servant (which we heard about last week). Jesus is very popular; he has many people around him: his own 'fan club'. As they approach Nain, they meet a very different kind of crowd coming out of the town. It's a funeral procession, and walking in front of the coffin a woman, all alone, obviously a widow. In the open coffin, a young man, her only son. Nobody asks Jesus to intervene, it's a 'chance' meeting, but, as Jesus assesses the situation, we're told, '*his heart was filled with pity for her*' (GNB) or in other translations '*he had compassion*'.

Jesus can see that the widow's situation is hopeless. She is now all alone in the world. His command to her: '*don't cry*' may seem rather heartless but apparently it could be translated '*don't go on crying*' which implies that Jesus is about to **do something** to change things!

He draws near, touches the coffin and **does something** miraculous: raising the young man to life. Jesus' compassion involved radical action!

Salvation

This story is an account of Jesus' wonderful compassion and amazing power in a particular situation at a particular time.

But it can also be seen as a picture of God's great salvation plan for the world. As Jesus raised this young man to continue his earthly life, I wonder if he was thinking about the eternal life and resurrection he would give to all those who would come to believe in him?

The young man in this story was dead and incapable of doing anything, and his mother must have felt as though she was as good as dead. She had a desperate, hopeless future ahead of her. To add to the hardship, loneliness and sorrow, there was the knowledge that her family line had ended. Without a male protector and provider, she would have no income since she would be unlikely to be able to work herself. She would have no security and no place in society. She would be reduced to a life of begging for food and money to keep alive.

In the same way, our whole world was dead in sin, lost and hopeless, able to do nothing to help ourselves. Although people were originally made in God's image to do his will, we chose not to and so became separate from God.

But God, looked on in love. He acted in compassion. He came into a hopeless situation and **did something**. He sent Jesus to provide a way back to God and raise us to life with him. God 'drew near' he visited his people with compassion.

Paul describes this in his letter to the Ephesians Ch. 2:

Eph 2:1 'As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....'

Eph 2:4 'But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ....'

Eph2:6 'And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms... that he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.'

So, just like for the widow in the story, there is hope, death becomes life, the situation is turned around. If we have faith in Christ, we no longer live under the power of death and sin. The penalty of sin and its power over us were miraculously destroyed by Christ on the cross. We can have the hope of a secure future and provision of our needs.

As we think of that transition from death to life we see the same thing happening in Paul's life which he described in his letter to the Galatians. (the reading we heard earlier) Paul was converted from a life of death, persecuting those who followed Christ, to a new life of bringing people **to** Christ as he preached the Gospel, making them '*alive with Christ*'.

So we see Jesus turning round what seem impossible situations:

- giving life to a dead man and his mother (who must have felt like she was as good as dead),
- transforming Paul from killer to one who would bring life to many, and
- making us alive in Christ despite our sinful nature and our tendency to ignore God.

We see Jesus' total power and authority over death, both physical and spiritual death. He has power to do the impossible.

And yet it's so easy for us to give up expecting this. We ask for things, then end up thinking they're never going to happen. Have you prayed for a dear friend or family member to come to know Jesus? and nothing seems to change. Time goes on and you start to wonder whether it's worth carrying on praying, it seems so unlikely that it will ever happen.

We pray for revival and growth in our churches, but it seems like we just plod on much the same.

We really want to share the amazing hope we have in Jesus in our villages and work-places, but it never really happens.

Be assured, keep on persevering, surely the God who can raise people to life can and will make these things happen! And, of course, we must remember, he is likely to want us, with his help, to have a part in this! So let us accept God's gift of life to us, praise him and let's use our lives to do his will and fulfil his purposes.

Remember, we are '*made alive with Christ*' and '*raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realms*' – it's quite hard to appreciate what that means really, but it's an amazing promise of being able to share with Christ in our lives now, with all the ups and downs, and for eternity. And this is something which is only made possible by his compassion and grace (his giving us what we don't deserve).

As God's people, let his compassion inspire each of us to acts of compassion – sharing with people in their suffering and **doing something** to help alleviate it : empathy **and** action – just as Jesus did for the Widow of Nain, for Paul, and does for each one of us.