

Luke 7:11-17 “certainty in uncertain times” CCH sermon 14th June 2020

Let me read the end of V16 *God has come to help his people.*

There's no doubt that we are living in uncertain times... there's uncertainty about the **future**- which lockdown restrictions will be lifted when? There's uncertainty about **relationships**- when will grandparents be able to hug loved ones again? There's uncertainty about **finance**- what will our bank statements look like in the months to come. There's uncertainty about **employment**, with many people currently not working or with their jobs are on the line. There's of course uncertainty about **health and even life** itself, with not knowing whether we'll get the virus or not.

So is anything certain any more?! I've called this sermon “certainty in uncertain times”, because today we are looking at two wonderful certainties from the life of Jesus which take us to the heart of why Christianity is good news.

Now, I don't know if you know anything about Luke our author. He wrote one of the the four biographies (or “gospels”) of Jesus in the Bible, and he was a doctor. In fact, as a church we are working through the early chapters of his *other* book at the moment, called Acts....so do join us next week as we pick up that series.

But the thing to know is that Luke's books are all about certainty. At the start of his first book, Luke writing to a friend, says that the purpose of his book is so that he can know the “certainty of the things you have been taught”. In other words, Luke has done some painstaking research talking to all the eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus to write down everything carefully as it happened.

So as we look at this story in Luke 7, in a world of uncertainty, we come face to face with two wonderful things that we can be certain about in uncertain times. The first is the certainty of Jesus' **compassion**, and the second is the certainty of Jesus' **power**.

Let's look at the story.

V11 *Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him*

Picture the scene. It's a sweltering middle eastern day and the sun is beating down. You are in the crowd following behind Jesus. Maybe you are inquisitive, maybe you have heard stuff about him, and you want to know what this Galilean preacher is all about, and what the fuss is about surrounding him.

So you tag along with the crowd moving from one small town to another. And then your crowd collides with another crowd, and that's when you realise what is happening. The unmistakable sounds, sights and even smells of a funeral in the middle east. And as often is the case today, the younger the deceased, the bigger the crowd.

Now any funeral is a tragedy, and it may even be that people watching today have lost loved ones, and perhaps that has been amplified by the fact that you haven't been able to gather with many others to have a proper funeral. If that is you, I'm so sorry, and our sympathies are with you//. We have had a number of bereavements in our church in the last year (as Alice shared), and so it feels like none of us are very far away from grief.

But what makes this funeral so extra tragic is what we read in verse 12.

V12 *As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*

The only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Normally you don't expect to bury your own children. We don't know how old the mother was, or the son, perhaps he was quite grown up, perhaps he was only in his teenage years. What is clear is that he was her only son, and she had already lost her husband, perhaps very early in her marriage because this boy didn't have any siblings.

It's absolutely crippling. It's not fair is it? Sometimes in life you meet people who just get hit again and again by multiple tragedies. As if losing her own husband in his prime wasn't enough, leaving her to bring up her son on her own, she had now lost her beloved son, and she was all alone in the world.

But there's an added insult to injury in this story, because in these days before any kind of welfare state, she had not only lost her only companion and close relative, but she had also lost her only source of income, and protection, and it was the end of her family tree.

Perhaps there were others in that town who might take pity on her, but there was a good chance she was going to be on the breadline now for the rest of her life.

But this is where we see our first certainty today. **The certainty of Jesus' compassion.**

V13. *When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her*

This is the most wonderful thing about Jesus. He doesn't wait for you to ask, he doesn't wait for permission, he doesn't need a hint. His heart goes out to you. He is the friend of sinners, the great saviour of the world. He knows what you are going through and he reaches out.

The word there for his heart went out to her, (in other Bible translations "he had compassion on her") it's actually the word for the very internal organs or guts of a person. He was moved at the deepest point of his being.

Maybe there's someone watching this today who is suffering. Perhaps it's a bereavement like this, perhaps it's some tragedy that no-one else knows about or really understands. Well Jesus does, and his heart goes out to you. He doesn't just send sympathy or empty platitudes. His very self, his heart goes out to you. The certainty of Jesus' compassion.

In fact the amazing thing about the God of the Bible, is that he himself knew what it was like to lose his only Son at the cross, and so if I can put it like this, hard wired into God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is an eternal and infinite compassion and empathy for anyone who has suffered loss. Jesus knows, and he feels, and he is compassionate.

And if you are suffering today, as everyone is to a greater or lesser extent in these times, you can know the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ, taking an interest in you, as his heart goes out to you.

But there's a problem. If Jesus is so kind hearted and compassionate and gracious, why does he then say one of the most callous and unkind things recorded at any funeral?

V13. *When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and said to her, "Do not weep."*

Can you think of anything more inappropriate for a stranger to say to a mother who has lost her only child at that funeral, than to come up to her during the funeral procession and to say "Don't cry". Does he want to have his lights punched out? Don't weep??!

Weeping, (or then even wailing) is absolutely appropriate at a funeral. It's when we begin to come to terms with our loss, and mourn all that is gone, all that that person meant to us, that we will never see them again. "Don't cry?" This man should be given psychiatric help, not a platform to speak from.

Except watch what happens next. V14. *Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still.*

It may have been an open coffin, more likely a plank of wood. And Jesus goes up to it, and the coffin bearers stop. I don't know if you've ever been in a formal ceremony and something unexpected happens. Everything stops, and everyone looks around and doesn't know what to say.

As a minister, I've taken a few wedding services, and there's the point when there's a chance for anyone to give a reason why the wedding should not go ahead. Fortunately, I've never had anyone say anything then, except perhaps a rather mistimed cough from Granny. But if someone bursts in at the back, and shouts out "this marriage must not go ahead", as sometimes happens in films, there's a look of absolute gobsmacked silence on everyone's face. I reckon it would have been like this in Nain that day, not at a wedding but at a funeral. No wonder everyone stops in their tracks.

And look at the rest of verse 14. He said, *'Young man, I say to you, get up!'* But I love how Luke, the doctor, records the next line. Verse 15 *The dead man sat up and began to talk*

As if to bring out how stark it is, he still calls him the dead man. A man who has been cold and decomposing, is suddenly sitting up with the blood pumping around his body, and to prove it, he's talking again. It's absolutely shocking, and yet it happened before their eyes.

The Certainty of Jesus' Power. And there's a lovely note there at the end of verse 15, as if even amidst the miracle, Jesus doesn't forget who he's doing this all for. *Jesus gave him back to his mother.*

The certainty of Jesus' compassion and the certainty of Jesus' power. There's no doubt as the crowds exclaim in verse 16 that Jesus is someone extraordinary through whom God is coming to help his people. God's promised King, the Messiah. No wonder, verse 17 that the news spread far and wide.

Well I wonder what you make of this story. I'd like to address 4 different people.

First there's "the uninterested".

So what? It's just a story. There are lots of stories out there. It doesn't have to mean anything. I've got my own life to live, and my own issues to deal with, and I don't need this right now.

But can I gently say, yes you have your own life to live, but you have your own death to die one day, and so maybe you do need this right now. Because if there is even a grain of certainty in this story, which Luke is saying there is, then don't you owe it to yourself to take a look rather than shrug it off. This story could be the doorway to life, a life that changes the here and now, and goes beyond the grave.

Next I'd like to talk to "the sceptic"

Maybe you like science. You like hard facts, and the trouble with this is that dead people don't come alive and sit up and speak. And I'd agree with you.

But what if the one who invented those scientific laws, the one who created them was to walk on the planet and bend those scientific laws. What if the God who sent the curse of death visited his people to reverse it?

Can I remind you that this wasn't done "behind closed doors" (like the next football match you'll see on your screen) this was done before a live audience? And Luke specifically records not just one, but two large crowds coming together to witness this. So when Luke came to interview the people who were there, there were plenty of eyewitnesses, and he was able to put down exactly what happened on that day.

I know that dead people don't rise, but what if this one did, to get our attention and help us understand that there is a God in the universe who has compassion and power. You see this resurrection isn't the only one in the Bible. There are records of one or two resurrections in the Old testament part of the Bible (actually another widow's son not far from

here in the time of Elijah), and in the New Testament Jesus raised Lazarus (see John's gospel) and Jairus' 12 year old daughter, as we saw in our studies in Mark- see our sermon archive.

In fact Luke dedicates a whole final chapter of his book to prove the certainty of Jesus' own resurrection three days after his funeral to which this story points.

The certainty of his compassion and the certainty of his power.

Why not join our online Q&A on a Sunday night in 2 weeks' time when four men and women from our church: a policeman, a vicar, a teacher and a guy who works for Anglian Water talk us through another chapter of Luke's gospel, and the difference Jesus has made to their lives. Each of them will testify to how Jesus really is alive today transforming lives.

The uninterested, the sceptic, **"the impressed"**.

Maybe you are impressed by Jesus. You are really quite blown away. Here is something pretty amazing, pretty fantastic. You've got to admit, it's quite touching, quite amazing. It's not going to change the way you live your life, you wouldn't now call yourself a Christian, but you are pretty impressed.

Well the crowds at the time were impressed. But did they understand who Jesus was? Verse 16 "A great prophet has appeared among us". Maybe they were thinking of those guys people like Elijah and Elisha who did miracles like this back in the day. But Jesus is so much more.

Don't settle for being *impressed* by Jesus. That's the kind of response you might give to an online video you like on facebook. He demands more.

Look carefully at the end of verse 16. "God has come to help his people".

I wonder if they quite realised what they were saying. God has come to help his people. Indeed Jesus isn't just the help God is sending, he is God

himself. Who else can raise the dead, still the storm, heal the sick, and ultimately conquer death himself.

There's a final person I'd like to talk to, the uninterested, the sceptic, the impressed, and **"the worshipper"**.

You see Jesus really demands a bigger response than just uninterested, sceptical or even impressed. He has infinite compassion and infinite power. He demands and deserves our praise. We should be worshipping Jesus as the God of heaven, giving him our lives. I know many watching today will have already given Jesus their lives, and are wanting to thank and praise him afresh.

What a wonderful thing to know the certainty of his compassion, and the certainty of his power. When you come to Jesus he too brings this certain compassion and certain power to your life too, so that you can face life (and death) with confidence. He forgives your sins, and gives you power to change for the future.

Maybe you want to come to Jesus for the first time today and be known as a follower and a worshipper of Jesus. If so, why not talk to God now in the quietness of your own heart as we have a moment's silence, and then listen to our next song.