

New Life Wins
New! Sermon Series
5/14/17
Luke 7:11-17

Welcome/Intro/Vision: Happy Mother's Day!!

If you're just joining us we've been saying over the past couple of weeks that for many of us at various points in our lives, something NEW came along and changed our lives for the better:

a new job, a new relationship, some new opportunity was a turning point for something great that happened in our lives

New has potential to bring new energy, new opportunities, new hopes and dreams

But the problem is that new in this word has a very short shelf-life. New in this world has a very predictable pattern that just about everything follows from cars to houses to bodies and jobs:

New to familiar to old to broken to gone

And all of us have scars from living in this world—a world where relationships break down, promises break down, bodies break down, disappointments and frustrations sometimes feel like they're at every turn

And what the Scriptures claim that God has done in Jesus is take this whole progression and run it backwards, done a complete end-around on the laws of physics

On Easter Sunday, Jesus who WAS dead and gone is raised from that dead and gone by God his heavenly Father

And he's been raised from the dead in order to establish a New New that will never grow old, never fall apart, never decay or be gone ever again

And what it means to become a Christian is to enter into this NEW NEW thing that God has done in Jesus

where we trust him with our lives and we follow him, and in doing so, we're made new right along with him

Today on Mother's Day, I thought it would be great to bring up a mom that I've gotten to know over the past 6 months or so who has had two MAJOR new things happen to her in the past year

one was very welcome and wanted and expected and the other one was not

And in the process of both of these new things over the past year, God has been making her new and she's agreed to join me up here to share how God has been making her new

So please welcome Ashley Long as she comes up here to join me!

1. Happy Mother's day! We've been talking about new things in our lives, this past 12 months has been full of new things for you, one was welcome and the other not-so-much. First tell us about the GREAT new thing that's brought you joy!

[pop up a cute picture of Emerson on the screen here]

2. Not long after Emerson was born, you found out some very scary news. Tell us about that.
3. Now if you go back to a year ago this time, Mother's Day 2016, before all of this happened how would you describe your spiritual journey and your relationship with God?
4. Crisis seems to do one of two things to people spiritually—it either pushes them closer to God or further away. What compelled you to turn toward God in the midst of this crisis?
5. Can you share with us a few ways that the cancer diagnosis pushed you closer to the Lord? What kinds of things did you do? In what ways has God met you in this dark valley?
6. This has been a difficult season but at this point there's cautiously good news, can you tell folks your latest diagnosis?
7. Not everyone will face a cancer diagnosis, but all of us will face trials of different kinds, what would you say to folks in our community who are in the midst of their own difficult season?

[Pray a prayer of blessing and continued health over Ashley]

Now today we're going to wade into what could be difficult territory for some of us, something that Ashley fought to hold onto while she was fighting for her life
we're going to talk about Hope

We live in this fallen broken world where things go from new to familiar to old to broken to gone

It sure looks like all the laws of the universe are conspiring against us--this reality should take away this foolish thing in us called hope

And the reality is that this morning all of us have got baggage that we bring in here with us.

And in that baggage is all the hurts and pains and stuff that we've lost along the way, including dead dreams, dead hopes

And yet inside each of us is this thing in us that was made to hope, even in the face of this kind of a universe and in spite of the fact that all of us have had hopes that haven't been realized in our lives!

And what's more, when we do the strictly logical thing and we STOP HOPING
what we find that we are less human, not more human, we find that we are less alive,
not more alive

So we're stuck in this weird place: it is, logically and mathematically, foolish to hope
And yet, if we stop hoping, we stop living. If we stop hoping, we stop loving. If we stop
hoping, we are robbed of some of the essence of what it means to be fully human and alive

We believe that what God has done in Jesus with this new thing on Easter Sunday is not only
establish some new thing that's forever away and doesn't really affect us in this life until after
we die

We believe that the eternally New thing God has done in Christ is rock-solid ground for us to
declare that even in the face of loss and pain and agony and suffering and trials, that Hope wins

That there is a God that raises people to new life. That there is a God that raises old dreams to
new life.

That there is a God who has the power and authority to bring resurrection power to
work in our lives in any number of ways so that loss and despair is not the last word over us

So how do we live in this tension? How do you and I as human beings who seem to be hard-
wired for hope live with it?

How do we continue to hope, not just shut down and be cynical and hardened and sort
of protect ourselves from the pain of the world?

This morning we're going to look at a story from Luke 7, you can turn there now if you've got a
Bible with you

***11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went
along with him. 12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—
the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with
her.***

Many years ago I was driving in the car in Richmond, Virginia, it was a beautiful day, I had had
just an outstanding day of working with students and seeing God do some really cool stuff.

And I was driving in my car, with the music loud, and I was engaging in one of my favorite past-
times, I was playing the air-drums.

It's the only instrument I've ever been able to play well, so I continue to do so, perhaps
long after everyone else my age has given up on it

And in the middle of my little happy air-drumming party, I pulled up to a stop-light and there at the intersection was a guy who looked like this.

Homeless, hungry, needy, desperate. And I sort of felt the air go out of my little happy dance moment.

I turned the music way down, and I started to think and to pray and to ask God about some questions:

how can I or anyone else for that matter, ever be fully free to be happy when there's so much pain, so much brokenness in the world?

When my happy air-drumming met the homeless man's despair, his despair won; his despair and need trumped my happy day. And I wondered and I asked God if this is how it was always going to be.

Well, this is something of what's going on as we look at this story.

You've got Jesus, his disciples, and a large group all heading into Nain—here's a picture of Nain today. A really small town, probably very small back then as well.

And Jesus is heading into this town with this group of people, and Jesus is fresh off of some healings and some other extraordinary events.

And there's all this excitement and all this enthusiasm and this growing energy and crowd all around Jesus, all following him from town to town to see what he'll do next.

And as this large, happy crowd full of hope and expectation and expectancy approaches the town gates

They meet ANOTHER large crowd—this one has a very different kind of emotions and energy to it—they're surrounding a dead person being carried out—a young man.

the only son of his widowed mother.

This woman has lost her husband and has now lost her only son. And as a result of all that, in this culture she's very much alone in terms of people to take care of her, especially as she gets into her old age.

So this widow has lost her only son, and this crowd is following this coffin and this mother, all of them weeping and wailing and mourning.

And as these two crowds converge, there are three options. **Three options as these two large crowds come together:**

- 1. Despair: Death swallows Hope**

like it did for me that day in my car with the homeless man—sadness and mourning over-run and overwhelm the

The joyful, hopeful crowd is “brought back to earth” by the reality that children die, and that widows are left childless.

Implications: mourning and sadness and death are ultimate realities and they ultimately have the power to undo hope, joy and happiness

Any of you ever been in a place where you’ve felt like despair has the last word? Any of you been in a hard place where you wondered if you’d ever hope again? Or been in a particular situation that just felt utterly hopeless and you couldn’t see your way out?

2. Denial: Hope remains but only by ignoring Death.

Jesus and his crowd could pass by the large crowd and just pretend or try to ignore the dead child and the weeping mother and the mourning crowd.

This is what most of us do, right? Typically I drive right by the homeless guys, typically I don’t pause to weep when the funeral procession drives by

“Not my problem”—it’s a coping mechanism because it seems like the only other option is to be depressed all the time because there’s so much pain.

And to a certain extent, this is healthy and fine—you can’t actually take on all the pain of the world in your soul, you don’t have that kind of capacity

But that has some serious implications: only by living in serious denial can happiness and joy beat out and overcome mourning and sadness.

What that means is that death and sadness still has the final and last word, still has ultimate power.

Let me pause here to say this about these two options: only options BC!!!
before Jesus came along, these were in fact the ONLY two options

We all experience disappointments and heartaches of our day-to-day lives

We all have little deaths of disappointments in our relationships and in our work places and for some of us most profoundly we’re disappointed with ourselves

And so unless something outside of our human petri dish, unless something outside of our normal human experience comes in and changes the rules of the game, introduces some sort of new power or force

then Despair or Denial are our only two FINAL options for life on this earth—yes, there will be moments of joy and grace and love and laughter

but in the end, when all is said and done, death has the last word on all of us and so we either live under the shadow of that or we live in denial of that for all our lives.

But what Jesus came to do, what only he is equipped and capable of doing is what has never, ever, ever, ever happened before.

Jesus is the one sent from God to introduce a NEW power into the situation. Jesus is the game-changer. He introduces a new energy, He creates a third option.

And this is exactly what Jesus steps in to do as we continue to read the story:

13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

14 Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

So in the world B.C, before Christ, we had 2 primary options: despair or denial, but Jesus has come with New life and new energy and he offers us a 3rd option right here at Nain:

3. Hope Wins: Hope wades into Death and overwhelms it.

Implications: life ultimately wins over death, hope wins out over brokenness, sadness, loss.

Pain and loss are temporary, Joy and Hope are the last word of God over all of creation.

This is the New! Reality that Jesus has come to establish.

In this story, Jesus wades into the crowd full of mourning and in the wake of death, he touches the bier, which was basically an open coffin, a plank with the body of the young man on it.

In doing this, Jesus absorbs the fact that this makes him ceremonially un-clean according to the Jewish law,

and after this if he wants to participate in the religious life in the temple again, he’ll have to go through 7 days of ritualistic cleansing

But Jesus absorbs not just the ceremonial or cultural un-cleanness, he absorbs death in his body and he speaks life in return.

And Jesus's words create what they speak: life comes back into this boy's body and he begins to talk. And Jesus gives him back to his mother

Hope wades right into death—doesn't ignore it and doesn't pretend it doesn't exist; NOR is hope overwhelmed or joy swallowed up by death.

Hope and Death collide in real-time and for the first time ever, hope wins.
And this is just a foretaste of what is to come.

Jesus here at Nain absorbs the un-cleanness of a burial coffin and absorbs and overcomes one person's death with his touch and with his words of life
And gives a son back to his mother.

But a couple of years after this, Jesus at the place of the skull takes on not just one person's uncleanliness and not just one person's death

Jesus on the cross absorbs all our sins, all our death; and then three days later is himself raised from the dead, overcomes death

And of of this in order to give you and I back to our good Father.

See, Scripture declares that when we sin, we die and we're separated from God our Father.

The Scripture declare that we were dead in our sins, in the stuff that we do, say, think, in the attitudes and motives of our hearts—all of that stuff is tainted to varying degrees by sin and death

But what Jesus has come to do is to take away our death, to forgive us all our sins, and raise us back to life and give us back to our Good Father.

My friends, this is good news: Jesus has made it so that death and mourning and despair doesn't have the last word
and that we don't have to ignore pain and pretend it doesn't exist.

Jesus hasn't just painted over death, not just sort of done some sort of work-around

Jesus wades right into the heart of darkness, the pit of despair, and he comes out on the other side, victorious and triumphant.

And as he does this, he opens up that third way, that third option for you and for me.

This is the good news of the gospel: in a world where sin and death are realities and touch everything and indeed had ruled over everything,

And in a world where our options were either despair about this reality or denial about reality

Jesus has offered up a third option: a New life from God where hope wins. Victory over death and despair and sin has been fought for and won by Jesus for you and for me, God in the flesh come to get us.

In this story, the widow's hopes and dreams for her life and for her son's life were dead. There was no hope, there was no future for her given her context and the culture of her time

And what Jesus did was resurrect something old as a part of his work of making her new.

[REPEAT]

And so now I want to ask you a dangerous question, here's your Wildly Important Take-Home Question for this week, something to think and pray about this week:

do you have dreams and hopes that are as good as dead and gone that you might ask Jesus to resurrect as a part of him making you new?

All of us have baggage! And at the bottom of that baggage are dead old hopes and dreams.

Are there dreams or hopes that were a part of what gave you life for a while that got taken from you in whatever way

And just for this week, for just a couple of days, you're going to gently, humbly, look to Jesus and ask him if he might resurrect those

The kind of thing that I'm talking about is not the dream that you win the lottery! Let that one stay dead!

In fact, some of the dreams that have died needed to die so that something better might live in your life—again, some of those died and needed to stay dead, let those lie

But other dreams, other hopes—those were good, and maybe this week you could dig those out and offer those up to God and ask him if he might resurrect them

Because sometimes God resurrects something old in order to and as a part of making you new

I'm talking about a relationship with a friend or a sibling or a parent that's as good as dead—what if you prayed that God might resurrect that for you as a part of making you new?

I'm talking about dreams of what you thought you might do with your life

Maybe some good thing that you at one point you were almost sure God wanted you to do—maybe a door never quite opened, the opportunity never quite came along

Or maybe even it did, and you just weren't ready, you missed it, or you went the other way, ran from God's call and what God wanted you to do?

what if you prayed that God might resurrect that for you as a part of his work of making you new?

Maybe I'm talking about something that you just kind of let slide, never got around to doing: writing a book, doing some song-writing, starting a non-profit, stepping into some cause that you're passionate about

What if you dug that out of the baggage you brought in here and asked God to resurrect that for you?

And what that might look like, you have no idea, you don't know how, you don't know the mechanism or the outcome or what all that will be like

you're going to leave all that up to Jesus who alone has the power to breathe new life into dead dreams and hopes and who sometimes delivers on that in unexpected ways

Like the married couple who longs to have kids for years, can't have them, and ends up finding great joy in adopting the kids God had for them

Jesus delights to make all things new, here and now—new. And sometimes that entails taking up something that's old and good as gone, and breathing new life into it

Do you have dreams and hopes that are as good as dead and gone that you might ask Jesus to resurrect as a part of him making you new?

Poem if time:

Two Large Crowds

Two large crowds converged the other day
just outside of Nain
Each with a Lord in the lead.

The Un-Maker had long ruled in that country
since the day of the Great and Terrible Exchange
the day the Icons cracked under the weight of pleasing to the eyes lies.

The Again-Maker--healer, prophet, miracle-worker—
had brought temporary relief
but rescue was impossible
it seemed to the Orphans in the Land of the Ruins

Each Lord a singular point
a large crowd in His wake.

The Un-Maker wake: Heavy. Weeping. Mourning. Loss. Somber. Dreamless.

The Again-Maker: Jostling Glad Eager Expectant Hope-Filled Laughter

Each person bore the fruit of life lived in its' leader's wake

(Each one is found in one wake or the other.)

The Un-Maker. The Again-Maker.
One has the final word
one must
submit
as these two crowds converge

The Again-Maker had won small skirmishes with His Yes
But Death--
The Un-Maker's greatest No--
Had never been beaten.

Ever.

The Un-Maker who had widowed her before
now struck her childless
And all those with her
labored and crumbled under his reign

The widow and his coffin meet the Again-Maker:
Compassion.
The Again-Maker touches the No
that had ruined all his masterpiece
And all is tense silence stopped

Living Words:
"Get up!"
And the son
is given back
to the one
from whom he came

Just as He would do
in his again-making re-gathering of all creation

When this Son also Rises.

Joy swallows mourning.
Life swallows death.
Yes triumphs over no.

Hope Wins.

Two large crowds converged the other day
Just outside of Nain.