



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 14th, 2013

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

Today's Gospel relates what at first appears to be not a especially notable miraculous raising of a young man from the dead. May be it sounds a bit odd to describe the raising of a person from the dead as "not especially notable." After all, even today,, it remains just as rare a phenomenon for dead people to be brought back to life as it was in the First Century Anno Domini.

Yet for a brief period in the Holy Land true miracles were relatively commonplace. During his three-year ministry, Jesus not only cured people of a variety of incurable diseases, he also raised many people from the dead.

John the Baptist's disciples had asked him: "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" He replied: "Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard: How that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the Gospel is preached."

Jesus is not merely citing happenings that John's disciples have eye-witnessed. He is quoting the Prophet Isaiah to them. And he didn't say: "A dead person has been raised up." Or even "two or a few dead people were raised up." Jesus says: "The dead are raised up." In other words, it's an on-going process and it involves a substantial number of people.

Skeptics might try to dismiss his healings as "hypnosis", "mind over matter" or "auto-suggestion" or some such?. But if there are two

conditions that are quite impossible to treat with hypnosis or autosuggestion, they are leprosy and death.

Leprosy is a disease that horribly disfigures on its victims. Only God can repair such physical damage. Only God can repair a broken human body to raise it from the dead. Thus, when Jesus performed such miracles, he was demonstrating His divinity.

The raising up of the widow's son was thus by no means unusual. The disciples must have seen Jesus perform such miracles many times. Why, then, did this miracle make such a strong impression on those disciples that St. Luke felt compelled to record it?

First, this miracle took place shortly after the most momentous event in their lives. It took place within days of Jesus choosing Matthew and eleven other ill-assorted men to his apostles. And it was immediately preceded by a Roman Centurion – one of the Jews' imperial masters – begging Jesus to save the life of his sick slave and making an extraordinary confession of faith:

"Lord . . . I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." Such humble words from an officer in the proud Roman army were not easily forgotten. Nor was the miracle at Nain.

Consider: Jesus, accompanied by his newly appointed disciples, is approaching the small town when they encountered a funeral procession leaving the city gate. From St. Luke's account, it seems the widow's son is highly regarded for a large crowd is accompanying his body to the cemetery.

The miracle is a miracle memorable for the fact that the widow didn't beg Jesus' help. St. Luke, an extremely careful reporter, tells us Jesus acted entirely on his own initiative: "When the Lord saw her," he writes. "He had compassion on her,"

But Jesus' only recorded words to her are not words of comfort but of command: "Do not weep," he tells her. He then walks up to bier and touches it. The men carrying it come to a halt. Jesus looks at the corpse and issues another order: "Young man, get up." And the young man sits up and starts speaking. Jesus then presented him to his mother. That's it!

The newly-called apostles, and St. Luke with them, were clearly amazed that Jesus raised the man from the dead by command. He didn't get down on his knees and pray – begging God's help. It struck St. Luke, a highly educated physician, as forcibly as a slap in the face is that Jesus simply ordered the young man back to life. It was an act of creation – an act only God can perform.

It was mind-blowing. Before a large crowd, Jesus, entirely on his own authority, with no intercessions to God, calmly – casually almost – says: "Young man, get up." And the dead man gets up as though nothing at all had happened to him. It was an extraordinary display of Jesus' powers as God incarnate.

Let us now contrast this miracle with another that is very similar, but which took place towards the end of our Lord's earthly ministry – the raising of Lazarus. The situation was quite different from that at the town of Nain.

Jesus wasn't raising a perfect stranger, but one of his closest friends – a man who had been decomposing in the grave for four days. Yet

instead of walking straight up to the tomb and issuing a peremptory order – "Lazarus get up" – Jesus makes a big production out of it.

St. John tells us Jesus groaned in the spirit and was troubled." and "Jesus wept." This is the very same person who ordered the widow at Nain: "Do not weep." So what has changed? Why should Luke's masterful Jesus be so different from John's?

First, there is Lazarus: Unlike the widow's son at Nain, he had known Christ and believed. At the time, he was raised up He was enjoying the bliss of life everlasting. Jesus was certainly doing him no favor to drag him back to this vale of tears. Then there are Mary and Martha, two of Jesus' most beloved disciples.

Unlike the centurion who said: "Lord, trouble not thyself . . . I am not worthy . . ." they show no awareness they are face to face with God. There is no sign of humility. They are beside themselves with fury. "Lord," they told him, "If you'd come when we called, Lazarus would still be alive."

The centurion had known Jesus only days; Mary and Martha had been his close friends for three full years. Yet the Roman believed, while his two closest friends doubted.

Jesus told Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes on me, though he were dead yet shall he live: And whosoever lives and believes on me shall never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes," she replied. But secretly she called on her sister to help pressure Jesus to raise Lazarus.

That alone was enough to justify Jesus weeping, groaning and being troubled in the spirit. Instead of humbly professing their faith, like the centurion, Martha and Mary, his old friends, equivocated – just as we equivocate when, in the Creeds, we say, "I believe" but actually mean "I think" or "I feel." Or even "May be." *AMEN*

To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. AMEN