



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 20th 2015

**✠ In the Name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN ✠**

The Gospels contain detailed accounts of only three instances of Jesus raising people from the dead. Yet it is clear from the Gospel accounts that these were by no means the only occasions upon which Jesus summoned the dead back to life.

Early in our Lord's ministry, St John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask: "Art thou he that should come or do we look for another?" Jesus replied with the words: "Shew John those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

He didn't say "a dead person was raised up" or "two dead people have been raised up" [Lazarus was raised just before Palm Sunday]. He said: "*THE DEAD* are raised up." This statement implies he has raised people from the dead in considerable numbers. And it is clear that neither the Baptist's disciples, nor anyone else for that matter, saw fit to challenge this statement.

However while the idea of raising people from the dead strikes a nerve in the heart of all of us mortals, these resurrections are by no means the most remarkable of Jesus' miracles.

With the possible exception of Lazarus who'd been dead for four days and was, thus – given

the nature of Holy Land's climate – in an advanced stage of decomposition, these miracles were not acts of creation in quite the same way as miracles that at first appear rather less spectacular.

For example, when he healed the eyes of men born blind Jesus was miraculously recreating, or repairing, organs that were entirely absent from the body or malformed. Similarly, when curing people who were lame or deaf, Jesus was actually forming new living tissue, as well as knitting together torn sinews and broken bones.

These are acts that, albeit in microcosm, are in no way less wondrous than the creation of the universe and all that therein is. To be sure, surgeons today can effect many of the same sort of cures, but only by means of arduous study and labor. Even a surgeon as brilliant as Dr. Ben Carson cannot heal as Jesus did in First Century Judea – by simply willing it to happen.

Some miracles might be more spectacular than others, but this isn't the reason why the men who wrote the Gospels recorded only three instances of Jesus raising people from the dead. The Gospels are not an exhaustive account of Jesus' ministry. As St John wrote, in closing his Gospel: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose

that even the world itself could not contain all the books that should be written.”

What the authors of the Gospels did is provide us with examples of the sort of miracles Jesus performed not so much with intention of inspiring wonder as illustrating a theological message. This, in turn, might explain why we are given accounts of three very different resurrections from the dead.

The raising up of the widow’s son just outside the small town of Nain – the subject of today’s gospel – might appear to have happened on the spur of the moment. Even so, it’s hard to believe that God, being all knowing, acts impulsively.

That said, here’s how it took place: On meeting the funeral procession. Jesus immediately tells the grieving mother not to cry. He walks up to the stretcher on which the body is being carried and – entirely unbidden - - tells the young man words: “Okay kid, get up.” The young man gets up and Jesus takes him to his mother.

Then there’s Jarius, an influential Pharisee who so loves his dangerously ill daughter so deeply he willingly puts his leadership of his Synagogue in jeopardy by humbling himself to beg Jesus to come to his house and heal her.

Jesus sets off with him, but before reaching his house, a servant arrives to say the girl is dead and there is no point in coming. Our Lord ignores this, telling Jarius: “Fear not. Believe only, and she shall be made whole.”

When they arrive at the house, they are informed yet again that the girl is dead. Jesus tells the mourners not to weep, because the girl is not dead but sleeping. They “laugh him to scorn.” Even so, Jesus goes her bedside, takes her by the hand, saying says: “Little girl, get up.”

The raising of Lazarus is rather different. For starters, on being informed that Lazarus, a

very close friend, is desperately ill, Jesus prevaricates, dawdles, and takes six days to arrive. When he gets there, Lazarus has been dead and in the grave for four days.

Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha, beg him to bring him back from the dead. Jesus attempts to persuade them otherwise. Eventually he gives in, but before he shouts “Lazarus, come out”, he groans in the spirit and weeps.

There are an abundance of similarities in these three miracles; the most striking being the remarkably casual way in which Jesus performed them – no prayers, no beating his breast and no begging God’s help. He simply tells the dead person to get up. And that’s it.

The differences are no less striking. In the case of the dead man at Nain, Jesus acted without being asked to help a widowed mother in despair. It teaches that God is aware of our needs and responds to them before we ask. It is reflected in the collect that begins: “Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid.”

The raising of Jarius’ daughter teaches us that when we approach God in humility he takes the awful things that happen to us and makes them turn out not just for the better, but for the very best.

All three of these miracles reflect God’s guarantee of eternal life. But the raising of Lazarus teaches that what we should really be looking forward to is not an earthy resurrection, but the eternal one.

Jesus didn’t weep before summoning Lazarus from the grave because he was unsure of his ability to do so. He wept because Lazarus was in paradise. Jesus knew the sorrow – horror even – Lazarus would feel at returning to earthly life. It is our assurance that death is simply the gateway to a life more vibrant, more joyful, more real than anything we have known on earth. *AMEN.*