

1 Kings 17:8-24

⁸Then the word of the LORD came to him, ⁹“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” ¹⁰So he arose and went to Zarephath; and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” ¹¹And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” ¹²And she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a cruse; and now, I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” ¹³And Elijah said to her, “Fear not; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make for yourself and your son. ¹⁴For thus says the LORD the God of Israel, ‘The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” ¹⁵And she went and did as Elijah said; and she, and he, and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The jar of meal was not spent, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD which he spoke by Elijah. ¹⁷After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; and his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. ¹⁸And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!” ¹⁹And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her bosom, and carried him up into the upper chamber, where he lodged, and laid him upon his own bed. ²⁰And he cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, hast thou brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?” ²¹Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this child’s soul come into him again.” ²²And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. ²³And Elijah took the child, and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and delivered him to his mother; and Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” ²⁴And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.”

Psalm 146 (UMH 858)

Galatians 1:11-24

¹¹For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; ²³they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

Luke 7:11-17

¹¹Soon afterward he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹²As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. ¹³And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. ¹⁶Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" ¹⁷And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Revised Standard Version of the Bible

Incident in Nain

It is a Palestinian village scene in Nain, just a short distance from Nazareth (Jesus' hometown), and a day's walk from Capernaum (Jesus' new,

adopted town). The pallbearers are carrying the body of a young man in a long wicker basket covered by a shroud for burial outside the city. Except for very important people, ancient Jews buried their dead outside the city, usually on the day of death or the next day. Embalming was not practiced.

For modern, indifferent eyes and blasé people, the scene was dramatic enough by itself. Think of it: the dead man was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. The heartbreak and sorrow of the ages is contained in that statement. In that society orphans, such as this young man, and widows, like his mother, didn't have much support. Nonetheless, a great crowd followed the procession, indicating sympathy and support - at least for the time being.

But that day Jesus was in the little village of Nain. A large crowd had gathered around him, as was so frequently the case. Not much happened in the little town of Nain. They would have rolled up the sidewalks at nine o'clock - if they had sidewalks. In fact, nine o'clock was pretty late in Nain. People wound up their day much earlier than that. Not much happened in Nain after dark. Not much happened in Nain *before* dark.

But today was different. Today, Jesus had come to Nain, apparently coming from Capernaum where he just healed the Roman Centurion's slave. Jesus had gotten a lot of attention lately. In fact, he seemed to be on his way to becoming famous. Nain didn't attract many famous men. And so they gathered round him, hoping that he would say or do something interesting .

The funeral procession approached Jesus. He saw the widowed, desolate mother, had compassion for her, thinking perhaps of his own mother reputedly widowed at an early age.

Who wouldn't be moved by such a scene? Who wouldn't be distracted? In that time and place, a woman depended on her man for support. And this old woman had no man. Her husband must be dead, and now her son was dead too. It was hard to imagine a more pitiful scene.

Luke says that Jesus was moved to compassion. Of course, he was moved to compassion!

"Do not weep," he told her. Her tears for her son no doubt now intermingling with the tears shed for her husband. And in the continuing drama risking ceremonial impurity, he reached out, touched the bier and possibly the body, and the procession halted.

Can you see the modern setting -- someone halting the hearse, opening the door of the limousine, telling the widowed mother in mourning black not to weep, and then saying beside the coffin, "*Young man, I say to you, arise.*" Startling indeed, and startling enough in first century Palestine which had a tradition of miracle stories of great prophets like Elijah and Elisha raising widows' sons from the dead. And the young man sat up and began to speak, and like Elijah and Elisha before Jesus, the new great prophet gave the son back to his mother.

As we hear this story today, we wonder what it has to do with us. Jesus raised this young man from the dead, but he doesn't do that anymore. Does he? Jesus had found a woman at the bottom and had lifted her to the top. But he doesn't do that anymore. Does he? What does this story have to do with us?

When I thought about this story, I remembered that we call ourselves disciples of Christ. Do you know what that means? The word, disciple, means "learner." A disciple is a person who is learning from his or her teacher. A disciple is a person who is learning to be more like his or her teacher. What can we learners learn from this story?

One thing we can learn from this story is compassion. Jesus was a compassionate man. He saw this grieving widow, and was moved with compassion. And in his compassion, he did something to help.

But now Jesus is in heaven. Now, if Jesus' work is to get done, his disciples have to do it. We are his hands in this world. He has sent his Holy Spirit to dwell in us so that, just as people could look at Jesus and see the Father, so people can look at us and see the Son. So we, Jesus' disciples, need to put Jesus' compassion into practice.

People need compassion today, don't they! This is a tough world, and many people are hurting. They are lonely; they are afraid; they are broken-

hearted; they are grieving.

Diane Komp is a pediatric oncologist--that is, she treats children who have cancer. A highly trained physician, she used to be an agnostic. That was before Anna died. Anna was a little girl who had leukemia, back in the days when recovery was rare. As death came close, her parents, the hospital chaplain, and Dr. Komp gathered at her bedside.

"Before she died," Dr. Komp writes, "Anna mustered the final energy to sit up in her hospital bed and say, 'The angels--they're so beautiful, Mommy, can you see them? Do you hear them singing? They're so beautiful, Mommy.' And then she lay back on her pillow and died."

The chaplain, who was uncomfortable with all this, left quickly, leaving the agnostic Dr. Komp to help these grieving Christian parents. What she remembers is that Anna's parents were deeply comforted by what had happened, *"as if they had been given the most precious gift in the world . . . Together we contemplated a spiritual mystery,"* says Diane Komp, *"that transcended our understanding and experience."* Diane Komp was an agnostic no more. (Diane M. Komp, M.D., *A Window to Heaven* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), pp. 28-29.)

Many of you are familiar with Eric Clapton, the Grammy Award winning English guitarist, singer and composer. Clapton is one of the most influential musicians of the rock era. He has been inducted an unprecedented three times into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

On a warm spring day in March of 1991 Eric Clapton received a phone call from his wife, Lori. In a frantic voice she told him that their four and a half year old son, Connor, had just accidentally fallen to his death after crawling out of an open window of their 53rd floor Manhattan apartment. Clapton could not believe what he was hearing and rushed over the ten blocks to find paramedic equipment everywhere, and ambulances, and police cars. Only then did he begin to realize with a sinking heart, *"Oh my God, it is true."*

Months later he was to say in an interview in Rolling Stone magazine, *"After it sunk in that my son had died . . . it's funny, but I really didn't feel*

anything; I went blank. I just turned to stone and wanted to go away. I mean there was no way I could have ever prepared for what had happened. But in time I found that I couldn't avoid feeling the pain of Connor's death. I had to go through the suffering."

Out of his suffering, Clapton turned to his music and wrote a very personal song to express his grief . . . his struggle to live with the loss of his son . . . his yearning to know peace in his life again. You may remember the song. It became a popular hit. It is called, "Tears in Heaven," and its lyrics speak of Clapton's search for the healing of his shattered heart. These are the words he wrote to his son:

*"Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?
Would you hold my hand, if I saw you in heaven?
I must be strong to carry on, 'cause I know I don't belong here in heaven."*

The last words of the song are these:

*"Beyond the door, there's peace for sure,
and I know, there'll be no more tears in heaven."*

"Tears in Heaven," Published by Hal Leonard. Cited by Benjamin R. Bishop,
www.kuc.org/sermons/091204.htm.

When we are hurting, we need compassion; we need someone who will touch us with a gentle hand. And the people around us at home, at work, and at play need compassion too.

A little caring makes such a difference. When Edgar Guest, the famous poet, was a young man, his first child died. He just felt terrible. He says:

I was lonely and defeated. There didn't seem to be anything in life ahead of me that mattered very much.

Then he had to go to the drugstore for something. The pharmacist, a man named Jim Potter, saw him come in and motioned for him to follow him to the little office in the back of the store. When they were standing together in that quiet place, the pharmacist put his hands on Guest's shoulders and said:

Eddie, I can't really express what I want to say, the sympathy I have in my heart for you. All I can say is that I'm sorry, and I want you to know that if

you need anything, anything at all, come to me. What is mine is yours.

Many years later, Guest remembered that moment. He said:

Just a neighbor across the way — a passing acquaintance. Jim Potter may long since have forgotten that moment when he gave me his hand and his sympathy, but I shall never forget it, never in my life. To me it stands out like the silhouette of a lonely tree against a crimson sunset.

That's how it is, isn't it. Can't you remember when someone reached out and touched you with a healing hand? Don't you wish someone would reach out today and touch you with a healing hand? Don't you wish that you could reach out and touch someone else with a healing hand?

You can. There are hurting people sitting near you today. You have heard the prayer requests! And there is so much that is left unsaid at prayer request time — hurt so painful that the person cannot even speak of them.

And it isn't just here that people are hurting. You will meet hurting people at work. You will stand next to them at the check-out counter. Sometimes they will be difficult to love, because they will be lashing out. But Christ has asked us to be his caring hands, reaching out to touch these people with healing hands.

John Killinger, a well-known Presbyterian minister, tells about a business friend who was praying for a friend one morning. The friend was going through a tough time, so the prayer went something like this:

Dear God, please put your loving arms around my friend....

But then it was as if someone was speaking to him, so he stopped praying for a moment and listened. The voice said:

*What's wrong with putting your loving arms around him?
That is how people feel my arms.*

Ann Weems is a contemporary Christian poet. She wrote a few lines that are on point. She said:

I see your pain
and want to banish it.
I see your tears
and want to dry them.

I am the one God sends to sit beside you,
until the stars come out
and the angels dry your tears
and your heart is back in place.

That is what Christ wants us to do. That is what his disciples do. Let us decide to help banish the pain, dry the tears and sit beside the person — until their heart is back in place.

“Beyond the door, there’s peace for sure, and I know, there’ll be no more tears in heaven.”