

Self Renewal

Luke 7:11-15

We are looking at the acts of Jesus to point out the road we are to follow if we are to know the more abundant life. In working on today's lesson I came on an act that is so miraculous that I hesitate to touch it. But touch it we must, it is not ours to cherry pick, to pick and choose. Our study requires that we look at every act and take from it that which will enrich our life. In the 7th chapter of his Gospel Luke tells us of an amazing event that took place on the road outside of the town of Nain.

Luke 7:11-15

- 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.
- 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 coffin, and those carrying it 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. (NIV)

As I read of this amazing event my tendency was to say, *“Here is another miracle. I can’t understand how it can be. I am sure there is a practical explanation.”* And then go on to something that I could better understand. One thing for sure, we don’t have the power to raise the dead, or do we?

One of the amazing triumphs in our world is the work that is being done to renew the outward man, our bodies. In the ordinary course of events the passage of age carries with it the deterioration of the body. In some aspects, important aspects, medicine has developed the power to overcome this decay through prevention and replacement.

Looking at the table of life expectancy the last figure I remember is that the expected life span of man in this part of the country was 74 years. This class is a prime example that

we have exceeded that expectation. Fantastic forecasts are being made of the limits to which our lifespan will be extended.

This church has, or shortly will, be equipped with a defibrillator, an electrical device to overcome the effects of defibrillation of the heart muscles. The heart stops beating but by the use of the defibrillator the muscular activity can be renewed. A new beginning.

Growing in popularity is the organ donor program. The gift of ones organs after the heart has ceased. By this gift life, or a part of life's activities, can be restored in the recipient. A new beginning that each of us can offer our fellow travelers. What a memorial! I like the way the poet puts it. *“When you have reached the mountain top, then you begin to climb.”*

Physical birth begins a journey in which we experience a number of spiritual rebirths. There comes those times when we reach a new stage, a higher plateau in life. It is a new beginning when we can lay aside the past and reach for life at a higher level. That we can do this is not to say that one cannot

live this life purely on the physical and never know any higher birth.

For instance there is a spiritual reawakening into a civilized society. We come into the physical world as selfish, self-centered savages. On our climb to the more abundant, more productive life we are born into a civilized society.

Unfortunately there are some members of our world who never know the reawakening into an ordered, civil society. While we may not be the means to bring the more abundant life to this group of people who refuse or can't move forward we can see to it that we are not a part of the group.

There is for each of us the rebirth into knowledge. Here again too often there are some of us who are never born intellectually, all they know is hearsay. The great realm of truth is a great unknown to them. We have a responsibility to the man inside. A responsibility to awaken that man to truth. We also have a responsibility to awaken those young people that follow in our footsteps that they may follow after truth, to

know it and to possess it.

We have a grave responsibility to that little fellow inside, the man responsible for who we are. Unless the spiritual ideals of God and righteousness and justice and truth are alive as living realities in that little fellow the man outside is dead to life.

The highest birth to which a man may come is a commitment to believe in the teachings and follow the examples of Jesus Christ. It is to this resurrection that this class is committed. Through our studies we seek to grasp the ideals of Jesus and commit ourselves to being obedient to them. Unfortunately spiritual life is not always an upward climb. Just as there are hills to overcome there are pitfalls and valleys that we are heir to.

Sometimes it seems like nothing is going our way. The body aches, we are tired, we just can't seem to get going. We are discouraged, despondent. Within us is the question, "*What is the use?*" Our spirit grows sick. If we are not careful the

inner man will wither away carrying with it the outward us. Following the example of Jesus we are to stop the funeral procession, bring out the defibrillator and revive that which is dead. When we push the red button by which we reaffirm our personal faith we send a shock wave to the spirit that is the real us.

What do you really believe? A faith that is worth anything is a personal faith. We can't achieve a personal faith based on a substitute faith such as simply reciting the words of the Apostles' Creed. The inner man must have a personal faith that springs from the heart. It helps if we can say out loud those things in which we truly believe.

Do we believe that Christ is the revealer of God? That he has come as the pattern of life for us to follow? When we get stuck in the ditch, with the world crashing around us, it is hard to follow this pattern, it seems so unreal. It helps if we will reaffirm a belief that Jesus is the Man and that to walk the way he walks is the way to the better life.

Do you believe in the forgiveness of sin; that truth shall triumph? Say it and believe it as you say it and it will restart the muscles of the spirit within to bring us out of the dumps. It helps to read, or better still recite, the great passages we find in the Bible, *“He restoreth my soul.” “I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.” “The Heavens declare His glory.”*

Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism came to those times when he felt that his life’s work was in vain. Persecution got him down. In those hours he would repeat to himself out loud, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ... the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.”*

Another shockwave we can send to the spirit is the search to find what good can come out of this valley in which we find ourselves. The life of Joseph, the son of Jacob, is one of those

wonderful stories that what man meant for bad, God meant for good. *“Ever she sought the good, ever she found it.”* Joseph is one of but many stories of one who has struggled with great difficulties and in spite of it all achieved greatness and rendered noble service.

Looking back to those who have made great contributions to the betterment of life we see that many were sick, many were depressed, people who had to wrestle with debilitating hurts and hardships. Caught up in the valley of life, down in the dumps, we can jump start the spirit by visiting with those lives who rose up from a spiritual burial couch to live the life more abundant.

We know that action is the salvation of the physical and mental body. Use it or lose it is a rule of life. Unless we actually use our muscles they will grow weak and finally lose their usefulness. The deadly art of non-living is a malady that has captured our society. As a people we have adopted a tendency to observe rather than act, to avoid rather than

participate, to not-do rather than do. We have grown to be hesitate in our approach to this complicated business of living. Arthur Gordon tells us that *“The drive to live is a leaping flame ... but it cannot survive an endless succession of wet blankets.*

Yesterday was one of those wonderful, beautiful days with which we are blessed this time of year. Rather than take advantage of the enjoyment of it I sat inside before the television watching young men play a game. As spectators we tend to let the spiritual fire die down, and even out. We can't afford that. Life is too precious and too limited. One of the ways to resuscitate the dieing spirit is to find something that needs to be done and do it. Turning to the acts of Jesus we read *“And when the Lord saw her, (the widow, mother of the deceased) he said to her, Do not weep.”* We bring comfort to the spiritual center of our life when we say, *“This is what I believe.”* Now we are in position to say to that spirit being smothered by a wet blanket, *“Get up and live!*

Pastor's Message

Outward circumstances may change the outward form of a man's life, but each man is the architect of his inward life. Every man builds and furnishes for himself the spiritual house wherein his soul lives.

John Ruskin muses: "Do you know what fairy palaces you may build of beautiful thoughts, proof against all adversity? Bright fancies, satisfied memories, noble histories, faithful sayings, treasure houses of precious and restful thoughts, which care cannot disturb nor pain make gloomy; houses not built with hands for our souls to live in."

It is a solemn fact of life that every man's soul must live in the spiritual house he has built for himself. The most personal tragedy which can come to a man is for him to have built such a shabby spiritual home for his soul that he is ashamed of it, is bored with it, or for some reason wishes to escape from it.

The happy side of the fact is that no outward blow, no pressing care, or crushing adversity can displace a man from a spiritual home which he has constructed of noble thought, faithful sayings and blessed memories.

The poet phrased it well as he said,

*"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's
unresting sea!"*

PRAYER

Guide me, O God, as I try to build an enduring and satisfying spiritual house for my soul. Amen.

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