

I look forward to this Sunday morning time. I look forward to walking into the Church and greeting Vicki and Wally and Carol and Sue – the early arrivals, you know.

I look forward to hearing the air conditioner running, and the organ starting up, and the elevator whisking up from ground level with the second wave of people to arrive.

I look forward to watching the ushers getting the bulletins ready – stuffing those pesky Sermon Notes! On Communion Sundays I look forward to watching Anne bring up the bread and the wine, preparing the Table for the meal.

I look forward to watching the PowerPoint people and the Video people and the Radio people and the guy who captures the service digitally to put it on the Internet – all of these balcony people – I look forward to watching them arrive and prepare.

I look forward to smelling the coffee brewing – even though I do not touch the stuff! I look forward to seeing all of you regulars come in, and look around for friends and have a conversation.

I look forward to seeing guests entering the sanctuary for the first time. And I feel for you in those first anxious moments when you wonder if this is the right place to be – we pray that this is the right place for you this morning.

I look forward to practicing with the musicians for the 10:30 service; hearing the bass and the drums and the electric piano – Joyful Noise!

I look forward to all of these Sunday morning things. But most of all I look forward to spending some spiritual time with my God.

Vicki last week reminded us to keep the main thing the main thing. And this is the main thing: we are here to meet with the living God.

Many people met with Jesus during his earthly ministry in a city called Capernaum. On the screen are a few pictures of this city on the seashore of Lake Galilee. It was a beautiful city.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us this: *“Jesus moved from his hometown, Nazareth, to the lakeside village Capernaum...”* [Matthew 4:13]

Many things happened in this city of Capernaum: here Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. Peter, James, John, Andrew, and Matthew all lived there. Jesus gave the word which healed a Roman Centurion’s slave while in Capernaum.

People gathered around Jesus in Capernaum. His fame spread. The house filled to overflowing capacity when he was teaching. There were some good times in the city of Capernaum. Sometimes we meet with Jesus in Capernaum.

Last week I met a friend downtown. He asked me what I had been doing lately. I told him, “Dealing with death, mayhem, and destruction.” And he said back to me: “Oh, typical church things.” I laughed at the time...

But afterwards I thought: no, that is not typical church stuff. Many people tend to think that the church – and the living God associated with his church – is only good in times of death, mayhem, and destruction.

- But the Bible says: *“God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!”* [Genesis 1:31] The Message translation says: *“It was so good; so very good!”*

These wonderful days which we share together – meals on decks, trips to visit friends and relatives, evenings spent at rib fest, softball games and golf outings – all of these things are a part of what God said was so very good. That is God stuff.

- The Bible also says: *“What a beautiful thing, God, to give thanks... To announce your love each daybreak, to sing your faithful presence all through the night... You made me so happy, God...”* [Psalm 92:1-4]

Let me ask: how many of you open your eyes in the morning in really tiny little slits, and only gradually – very gradually – open them fully? And how many of you spring your eyes open!

Either way, God is the eye opener. Every day those eyes of yours open – slowly or quickly – God is the one who gives you that privilege. And God is the one who tucks us in and watches over us. That is good God stuff.

Sometimes we are in Capernaum with Jesus. In the words of the hymn writers:

- “Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below.”
 - “Praise to the Lord, who over all things so wondrously reigneth... Hast thou not seen how all that is needful has been, granted in what He ordaineth?”
-

But Jesus knows that not everyone lives all of the time in Capernaum. In the Gospel story in front of us this morning, Jesus travels from beautiful Capernaum to this city: to Nain. On the screen is a picture of Nain. It was a city 20 miles from Capernaum, situated on a hillside.

The Bible tells us of only one time that Jesus went to Nain. And the Bible tells us of only one thing he did in Nain: Jesus joined a funeral procession.

On that visit to Nain three things happened.

1. First, Jesus saw the problem.

In this story Jesus connects with a woman. Jesus understands that she has lost her husband – one of the great losses of a life. And Jesus understands that she has lost her only son – probably the greatest loss in life is to lose a child.

Jesus understands that her losses are not yet complete: she will probably lose her home. Because of the loss of husband and son she has lost all financial and emotional support; so she will probably lose her own life in the not too distant future. To fully support herself all alone is too great a burden to bear for too long.

For her, life is not good. It is very, very bad. Trouble has come to her. But at that same time Jesus travels the 20 miles to Nain. And as far as we know only this one thing happens: Jesus helps her.

The Bible says that Jesus looked at her, felt compassion, and said “Don’t cry.”

If you or I looked at someone in pain and said, “Don’t cry,” we would be going against the advice of every psychiatrist and psychologist and grief counselor. And that is very good advice. Don’t ignore or belittle someone else’s grief or pain.

But Jesus was not ignoring or belittling her grief and pain. Jesus was entering into it.

There are times when the most gracious and loving thing we can do is give appropriate hope. Like when my kids were little and had spent a long time crying about something. And I wanted to say to them – and did – “don’t cry, it will get better.”

I think Jesus spoke to the woman in that way. It is OK to be sad. It is OK to cry. It is OK to grieve over what is lost. But, I am now here. And I have something for you for these days. Jesus saw the problem and gave hope: *“Don’t cry.”*

2. Second, Jesus saw a solution.

The Bible describes the solution with these words: *“Jesus gave him back to his mother.”*

I read those words after reading the Fargo Forum headline on June 7. That headline said, **“*Similar Lives, Similar Deaths.*”**

It was the story of the two ND college students who were murdered, Mindy Morgenstern and Anita Knutson. The words, *“Jesus gave them back to their mothers,”* would bring such a wonderful comfort at this time. Our hearts go out to the parents and friends.

I also watched on TV the news that morning that Kelsey Smith had been found dead, after being abducted in a parking lot in Kansas. Again the words, *“Jesus gave her back to her mother,”* would be such a wonderful gift to such a grieving family.

The solution Jesus sees is to give back what we have lost. When Jesus calls the son back to life and restores him to his mother, it is meant to encourage our faith that Jesus does give back what has been lost...

A grandfather took his grandson for a walk in the woods. As they were walking along the grandfather asked, "Do you know where we are?" The little boy said, "No!"

They walked further along. The grandfather asked again, "Do you know where we're going?" The little boy again said, "No!" The grandfather chuckled & said, "Well, I guess you're lost then." The boy looked up at his grandfather & said, "No, I'm not lost. I'm with you."

Jesus asks us, "Are you lost?" By faith we can look to him and say, "No, I am not lost. I am with you. Someday you will restore all things. Today I will walk with you."

3. The Third thing that happened when Jesus visited Nain, God was praised.

The people who saw this miracle said, "*God has visited his people.*" Sometimes we need to be the witnesses to say, "God has visited us. God is here to help."

- When someone dies and the loved ones gather here at the Church there is always a lunch. Sometimes cake and sandwiches, sometimes a hotdish.

Do you know what that meal after the funeral says to people? It says in a concrete way, "We are here to help you through this moment." And even more than that: "God is here to help you."

- On Rally Sunday our young people will go streaming upstairs to their Sunday School classes. And they will find in their rooms dedicated teachers.

Do you know what that says to a little child who races to their room? It says in a concrete way: "What we talk about here is true. God is here to help and guide you."

- Sunday after Sunday people we come into worship services. Sometimes we come with our frustrations and issues.

What does it say to you when someone in this place looks into your eyes and asks, "How are you feeling today?" When someone says to you: "I will pray for you." When someone listens to you; just listens to you. It says that we believe God has visited us. That is one way that we praise our God.

Now, here is the point for the sermon title with the word "trouble" with a double strikethrough. Either you or someone you know is going to have trouble this week. And for some it is going to be overwhelming trouble.

Somebody is going to feel alone, or broken, or at wit's end. For some the "trouble" is not going to have the double strikethrough.

You are in that mighty crowd of people who know that God has visited his people in Jesus.

- You are the grandparent who can walk with a child and say, "It is tough, but it will get better. God is walking with us."
 - You are the neighbor who can say, "I don't know what to say. That is a big disappointment. Let's pray about it together."
 - You are the friend who can walk with someone who has cancer, or diabetes, or arthritis, or Alzheimer's. You are the one who can bring God's promises and bring the peace that passes all human understanding.
-

You are the one who can leave this sanctuary this morning and carry this message to a thousand places this week.

That is why I love to come into this place and worship. Because I do believe in the One we listen to, and talk about, and worship and pray to. I believe he has the power to change things. I believe he has the compassion to care about us, and I believe he has work for us to do this week.

I believe he is with us in Capernaum and in Nain, in good times and in bad times. And I wanted you all to know this day that if you are like the widow who lost a son, you need to know that Jesus knows your problems, that he has a solution, and that he will bring you to a time when you can praise him again. Amen.