

## Beginning to Talk

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### When Two Crowds Meet at the Gate

Luke's Gospel is full of moments we would not know about Jesus if Luke had not chosen to record them. One such story unfolds in chapter seven—a passage that begins with a miracle and continues with a message. It is the account of Jesus raising the widow's son at Nain.

Picture the scene. Jesus, accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd, is walking uphill toward the city gate. At the same time, another crowd is moving downhill—a grieving mother, a widow, surrounded by townspeople, carrying her only son to burial. Two processions meet at the fulcrum of the city: one filled with life and anticipation, the other heavy with sorrow and loss.

Who has the right of way when life and death collide? Ancient rabbis taught that a funeral should yield to a wedding, because life takes precedence over death. Yet many of us grew up with the opposite custom—pulling over to honor the hearse. Customs vary, but Luke wants us to see that in this moment, Jesus himself yields to compassion.

Verse 13 slows the story down: "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her, and he said, 'Don't cry.'" Three movements are highlighted — Jesus sees, Jesus feels, Jesus acts. His heart races ahead of his body, meeting the widow in her grief before his feet arrive at her side. Then he speaks: "Young man, I say to you, get up." And the dead man sits up, begins to talk, and is given back to his mother.

Luke emphasizes the mother again and again. The son is described not simply as a corpse, but as "the only son of his mother." The miracle concludes not with the crowd's reaction, but with the son restored to her arms. Luke makes her the center of the narrative—the "deictic center," to borrow a literary term. Everything is oriented around her loss, her need, her encounter with Jesus.

This is not accidental. Luke repeatedly draws attention to parents and their only children: Jairus's daughter, the demon-oppressed boy, the child placed in the midst of the crowd. Each story reminds us that when a single child is lost, it feels as though the whole world collapses. And here, Luke invites us to see Jesus'

compassion not as abstract, but as deeply personal—his heart running toward a widow who has lost everything.

It is hard not to imagine Jesus thinking of his own mother, who would one day stand at the foot of the cross, left without her only son. Compassion interrupts his plans, his schedule, his journey. Compassion compels him to act.

And what does this teach us? That love requires all three movements: seeing, feeling, and acting. If we only see and feel, we risk stopping at sympathy or judgment. If we only feel and act, we may rush ahead without truth. If we only see and act, we may reduce people to projects or problems. But Jesus models the fullness of compassion—he sees, his heart goes out, and then he acts.

Luke centers the widow so that we might learn to center those who are poor in spirit, those who need good news most. In our own relationships, may we learn to notice, to let our hearts run ahead, and then to act with humility and kindness—just as Jesus did at the gate of Nain.

### **Telling the Whole Story**

How often do we pause long enough to let someone else be the center of our focus? Imagine it—sitting with a friend who is walking through difficulty, and instead of rushing to fix or advise, simply letting them be seen. Even for a moment, that kind of attention opens space for the Holy Spirit to stir our hearts with the compassion of Jesus.

In Luke's Gospel, we encounter a young man who begins to speak after being raised from the dead. His story reminds us of something vital: when we talk about what we've gone through, we need to tell the whole story. Too often, we feel pressure to wait until the miraculous conclusion before sharing. We fear that if we speak of the struggle—the heaviness, the waiting, the sorrow—someone will accuse us of lacking faith. So we hold back until the breakthrough comes, and then we only tell the triumphant ending.

But that's not how life works. We live every story through its entirety, not just the finale. Imagine Jesus telling the young man, "You may speak of being raised, but don't mention the fear you felt before death, or the grief your mother carried." Absurd, isn't it? Jesus never silences the hard parts. It's in the telling of the whole story—sorrow and joy, weakness and strength—that we see God's heart moving toward us.

This passage also brings us to John the Baptist. News of Jesus' miracles spreads, and John's disciples come with a question: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" It's asked twice in quick succession, signaling its weight. Jesus responds not with a lecture but with evidence: the

blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Notice the pattern. Every miracle highlights Christ's compassion for those who are marginalized, isolated, or broken. His power is not just about victory—it is about presence in the struggle. And then comes the hard word: "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Why would anyone stumble over Jesus? Consider John's situation. He is in prison, waiting for the Messiah to bring justice, fire, and sweeping change. Instead, Jesus is dining with sinners, comforting widows, and healing strangers. John sees Jesus doing for others what he longs to experience himself. That tension is real.

Jesus' benediction is clear: blessed are those who do not stumble when His ways seem slow, when His compassion looks different than our expectations, when His timing feels delayed. It is a heavy word, but also a hopeful one. For even in prison, even in sorrow, even in weakness, the Kingdom is breaking in.

The disciples who carried John's question may one day carry his body to burial. Yet even then, the testimony remains: Jesus has power over sickness, spirits, and death itself. And He calls us to trust Him—not only in the breakthrough, but in the whole story.

### **Trusting the Heart of Jesus When We Cannot Predict His Response**

Luke offers us a striking message: "Blessed is the one who does not stumble when they recognize that Jesus does not treat everyone in an identical manner, even as he prepares a kingdom in which we will all share."

That blessing is not abstract. It touches the very real stories we carry. Sometimes Jesus shows His power in dramatic ways. Other times, He gives us the quieter grace of perseverance. And He asks us to walk faithfully through both.

### **Power and Perseverance in Our Stories**

Many of us long for testimonies that end with a dramatic display of God's power. We hope the conclusion of our story will be healing, breakthrough, or restoration. Yet some of us discover, as we look back, that the greater gift was perseverance — the strength to endure what we thought we could not bear.

Luke places side by side stories that highlight this tension.

The widow rejoices when Jesus raises her son.

Jairus's household scoffs when Jesus insists that his daughter can be healed.

A father, desperate for help with his demon-possessed son, finds the church powerless and must go directly to Jesus.

In chapter 18, the disciples even try to send children away, failing to see what Jesus sees.

Sometimes the church disappoints. Sometimes the world mocks. Sometimes the miracle does not come in the way we expect. And yet Jesus says: "Blessed is the one who does not stumble because of me."

### **Trusting His Heart Beyond Predictability**

Luke could have separated these stories, but he chose to weave them together. Why? Because he wants us to hold both realities at once: Jesus raises the dead, and yet John the Baptist remains in prison until the great resurrection.

The blessing comes not from predicting Jesus's response, but from knowing His heart. To trust Him deeply is to receive whatever He deems best — whether power or perseverance.

### **Persevering in Prayer**

We are called to keep praying, to keep asking, to keep knocking. Sometimes God answers with dramatic intervention. Other times, He gives the Holy Spirit as the sustaining grace we didn't know we needed.

It is not always the conclusion we hoped for. Sometimes the plot twist is unwelcome, unexpected, or painful. Yet even then, Jesus pronounces blessing: "Blessed is the one who does not stumble."

### **A Word for the Weary**

If you barely made it into worship this week, if you are holding on by a thread, if tomorrow feels uncertain — hear this: there is a blessing for you today. Jesus invites you to His table, to receive grace for the next week, the next day, or even the next moment.

Whether He pours out power or grants perseverance, His heart is trustworthy. And as we tell our testimonies — even the unfinished ones — we bear witness to that heart.

*This text originated as a recent sermon by Fr. Christopher Caudle, and was edited by Copilot as well as editors at Third Millennium Ministries.*

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