

***RAISING THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN
TREASURE IN VESSELS OF CLAY***

**October 6, 2013
3rd Sunday of Luke
Revision E**

Gospel: Luke 7:11-16

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Today's Gospel lesson is used in the West at about this same time of year for the 26th Sunday after Trinity or sometimes for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost.

Whereas many of the accounts of events in Jesus' life are recorded in several, if not all four, of the Gospel accounts, today's lesson is recorded only by Luke. The setting for this event is early in the second year of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus had just finished the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5:1-7:29) and the "Sermon on the Plain" (so called from Luke 6:17) shortly thereafter (Luke 6:17-49). The Twelve Apostles have been selected by Jesus, (Luke 6:12-16) but have not yet been sent out two-by-two to heal the sick and cast out demons (Luke 9:1-6). John the Baptist had been imprisoned (Luke 7:18-23) but not yet beheaded by Herod (Luke 9:7-9). Shortly after this Gospel account, John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus and asked if He was the One to come or if they should look for another. Jesus replied that they should look around, for the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. Today's Gospel lesson was the illustration He gave them for the dead being raised.

Following the "Sermon on the Plain," Jesus went to Capernaum, which is at the Northern end of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 7:1). The next day, He went to the city of Nain (Luke 7:11) which is about 20 miles distant as the crow flies and is about 5 miles Southeast of His hometown of Nazareth. This was a good day's journey, since it meant crossing the mountain range near Mt. Tabor (1800 feet elevation).

As Jesus arrived outside Nain, accompanied by a large crowd, He encountered a funeral procession coming out of the city. Carried in an open coffin in the procession was the body of the only son of a widow. The funeral procession also had a large crowd, and the widow was openly weeping.

From the events described in Luke, it appears that the widow of Nain was not well off financially. First, the dead man was being carried in an open coffin (v.14). Secondly, when Jesus spoke to him, "Young man, I say to you, arise" (v.14), he sat up and began to speak immediately. There was no need to "unbind him" as was necessary for Lazarus when he was raised (John 11:44). This is because Lazarus and the Lord Himself were given a rich man's

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burial. For example, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea bound Jesus' body with strips of linen mixed with 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes, creating a mummy or cocoon (John 19:39-40). This is why Peter and John believed He was risen as soon as they saw the burial clothes; the mummy was empty and undisturbed; Jesus rose right through the burial wrappings.

For the son of the widow of Nain, there were no burial wrappings like Lazarus or Jesus. He was being carried to a pauper's grave. These circumstances put the widow in very difficult financial straits. Under Mosaic Law, no special provisions were made for widows (except for a share of the triennial third tithe) because the oldest son – who had the birthright or extra share of the property – had the duty to provide for her. This is why Jesus asked His second cousin John to care for His mother just before He died (John 19:26-27). In addition, the Scribes and Pharisees of that day were well known to foreclose on widows' houses when the poverty-stricken widows ran out of money (Matthew 23:14).

Of the three people Jesus is recorded as raising from the dead: Lazarus (John 11:38-45), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-24, 35-43) and the widow's son, in each case there is implied a considerable amount of compassion of Jesus toward the bereaved. In Lazarus' case, Jesus, Himself, wept (John 11:35). In Jairus' case, Jairus "begged Jesus earnestly, saying 'My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live'" (Mark 5:23). However, she died before Jesus arrived. In the case of the widow's son, Jesus came to the funeral procession uninvited, for "He had compassion on her" (v.15).

The above three cases represent three different stages of death. Jairus' daughter had just died and was still lying on her bed (Mark 5:40). The widow's son had died recently and was being carried to his grave (v.12). Lazarus had been dead four days and was beginning to decompose (John 11:39).

When the Lord saw the widow, He had compassion on her, raised her son from the dead and presented him to his mother. The response of both large crowds was one of being seized with fear glorifying God and saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us," and "God has visited His people" (Luke 7:16). Word of this event spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding neighborhood, including Nazareth (Luke 7:17).

This account in Luke is very similar to one that occurred during the life of the prophet Elijah. Elijah had prophesied that there would be no rain for 3 ½ years (1 Kings 17:1, 18:1, Luke 4:25). During most of that period, he lived in Zarephath (just south of Sidon) in an upper room at the house of a widow who had one young child (1 Kings 17:9-10). The widow was expecting to starve to death due to the famine (v.12), but Elijah saw to it that the jar of flour and the jar of oil never ran out (v.16). Near the end of the 3 ½ years, the widow's son died, and Elijah raised him from the dead (vv.17-24). According to tradition, the widow's son was Jonah the prophet, whose three days in the belly of the sea monster prophesied about the Lord's death and resurrection (Velimirovic, Prologue, Sept. 22).

With this background in mind, it was no accident that Jesus went to Nain at this time. A few months earlier, He quoted the above account about Elijah to people in the synagogue of Nazareth (5 miles away) in response to their unbelief (Luke 4:24-26). This made them so angry

that they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-30). They had wanted him to do in Nazareth what He had done in Capernaum (Luke 4:23), but Jesus said that “no prophet is accepted in His own country” (Luke 4:24), and He could do few miracles there (Mark 6:1-6). The response of the people of Nain was quite the opposite. This is a very interesting comparison. Even the Son of God can be limited in His performing of miracles depending on the faith of the people present. Why? In His mercy, He is reluctant to bring increasing judgment on them for rejecting Him.

Comparing Nain with Nazareth is a study in light versus darkness. John Chrysostom calls death and error, darkness: “For the light which our physical eyes see does not shine in darkness but apart from it; but the preaching of Christ has shown forth in the midst of prevailing error, and made it disappear. And He, by enduring death, has so overcome death that He has restored those already held by it,” (Homily V on John 1). Nazareth’s response to One who had grown up in their midst was to try to throw Him off a cliff; that’s darkness trying to overcome the Light. Nain’s response was to receive Him as a great prophet; that’s darkness disappearing when the Light arrives.

One might note that there is a difference between resuscitation and resurrection. The widow’s son in Nain was resuscitated; eventually he would die again. The same is true of other recorded cases in the Scripture: Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:41-56), Lazarus (John 11:38-46), many saints at Jesus’ crucifixion (Matthew 27:51), Tabitha raised by Peter (Acts 9:36), Jonah raised by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and even the dead man who touched Elisha’s bones (2 Kings 13:20-21).

The resurrection of the Son of God was different from all these. He rose, never to die again (Romans 6:9). His appearance in His resurrected body looked different in some way, yet He was still recognizable (John 21:12). His body was still flesh and bones, and He ate food in their presence (Luke 24:39-43). Yet His resurrected body passed through solid walls and appeared to His disciples when they were huddled behind locked doors (John 20:19).

Those who are raised by the Son of God at the Second Coming will be like Him. There will be a transfiguration where “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43, Daniel 12:3). These will never die again either “but have passed from death to life (John 5:24). May we all be found worthy of this resurrection and thus avoid the second death (Revelation 20:14).

TREASURE IN VESSELS OF CLAY

October 6, 2013
15th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Today's Epistle reading is used variously on the 4th Sunday after Pentecost or half of it on Transfiguration Sunday and the other half on the 4th Sunday after Easter.

Background for the Church in Corinth

Paul founded the Church in Corinth about 51 AD toward the end of his Second Missionary Journey and stayed there a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Silas was traveling with Paul at the time along with Luke, Timothy and Andronicus, where all but Paul were of the original Seventy. Luke was left behind to oversee the Macedonian Churches. (Note switch in tenses from "we" to "they" and back to "we" in Acts 16:16, 17:1, 20:6). Silas was left behind in Corinth and was later Bishop of Corinth. (Note that we never hear from Silas again traveling with Paul after he arrived in Corinth, Acts 18:5).

Before Paul arrived in Corinth for an extended stay again in late 55 AD, he wrote four letters to Corinth (two of which are lost) and paid the Church one brief visit. For more details of this see the Epistle lesson for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost. In the interval from 52 to 55 AD, Apollos and the Apostle Peter visited Corinth. Apollos was one of the original Seventy, but must have been back home in Alexandria at the time of Pentecost. He knew only the baptism of John in 53 AD when he came to Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28). Aquila and Priscilla, the overseers Paul left in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), straightened Apollos out and also wrote to the Churches in Achaia (Athens and Corinth) to receive Apollos when he arrived (Acts 18:27). Apollos proceeded to help out by vigorously refuting the Jews publicly showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:28). In the chapter just prior to our Epistle reading (1 Corinthians 3:8), Paul said that he and Apollos are one; that is, of one mind in the work of establishing the Churches.

The same can be said for the relationship between Paul and Peter. Peter visited Corinth in the early 50's AD on his way to Rome. He obviously made a big impression in Corinth since there were factions that had developed by 55 AD (1 Corinthians 1:12) centered around Paul, Apollos, Peter and none of the above (i.e. Christ)!! On Peter's way to Corinth, Paul met him in Macedonia and together they ordained four bishops:

Olympas	for	Philippi
Jason	for	Thessalonica
Silas	for	Corinth
Herodion	for	Patras (SW Greece)

Thus we can definitely say that Peter and Paul were one in the work also.

From a detailed study of Paul's Missionary Journeys, one can see that Paul worked with at least 60 of the original members of the 70 at some point. For more details, see Appendix A. Many of them like Luke, Timothy, and Titus traveled with him a lot. In addition, Paul had some contact with Peter, John, Andrew and Philip.

The Imagery of Gold and Precious Stones

The Garden of Eden: In and around the Garden of Eden, gold and some precious stones are mentioned: bdellium and onyx (Genesis 2:10-13). The implication is that they are just raw materials, however.

The Ephod: As part of the ephod or garment worn by Aaron the priest, were two large onyx gem stones with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel engraved on them (Exodus 28:9-12).

The Breastpiece: The breastpiece of judgment, actually a pocket or pouch, that contained the Urim and Thummin (meaning "lights and truth") had an embroidered face and held 12 large gems representing the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). Aaron continually carried the verdict or judgment of the sons of Israel before the Lord. This verdict was already given on the Altar of Burnt offering as part of Aaron's preparation (Exodus 28:29-30).

The New Jerusalem:: The light of the New Jerusalem was like a precious stone. The gates were twelve pearls, on which were inscribed the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The foundations were 12 precious stones on which are written the names of the Twelve Apostles (Revelation 21:10-21).

The Church Today: Paul was speaking of building with various materials: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw. In 1 Corinthians 3:17, the building is said to be the temple of God. Part of the building process is a fire test — this is part of the Word of the Cross (1 Corinthians 3:10-17).

We have a treasure in dirt (clay) vessels (2 Corinthians 4:6-9). The treasure is like the proverbial sword in the fire. The treasure is the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:6). As we carry our cross, the sword heats up and we begin to take on the image of God (v.4), which is the fire. This process is referred to as deification where we begin to become God-like. The words printed on icons of St. Athanasius reflect this: God became man that man might become god.

There will be tribulations in our lives, but this is just part of the process that refines the gold and cuts the precious stones. As we go on, we die a little more each day to our self-centeredness and death is working in us. The more this happens, the more we are aware of the will of God and grace and thanksgiving abound to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:8-15).

The result is that Christians have been a unique people. Consider the First Century writing of an unknown author describing Christians of his day: "For the Christians are

distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor [are they]...the advocates of merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives as to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking manner of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry ... beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring [literally, “cast away fetuses”]. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time, surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless [2 Corinthians 4:12]; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as though quickened to life; they are assigned by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred” (The Epistle to Diognetus, Chapter 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers).

What Happens to the Earthenware Vessel?

But yet a very real problem that the Church has had to address over the centuries is: “What happens to the clay vessel?” Gnostics in the First Century quoted Paul as saying that “...flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). Therefore, they said, the flesh and blood doesn’t matter and only spiritual things matter. The Apostle John vehemently opposed this idea (which was championed by ex-deacon Nicolas of Acts 6:5) regarding the gnostic Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 14-15).

In the same context as the above, Paul stated regarding the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52-54):

- The dead will be raised
- We shall be changed
- The corruptible must put on incorruption
- The mortal must put on immortality
- Death will be swallowed up in victory

The Gnostics stated that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18) and occurred at baptism. Paul vehemently opposed this and even delivered some Gnostics over to Satan (for the destruction of their flesh) in order that they may learn not to blaspheme in this regard (1 Timothy 1:18-20; compare 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

The Scriptures teach that in the resurrection the righteous will shine forth like the sun (Matthew 13:43, Daniel 12:3) and that we will be like Him (1 John 3:2) who is the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15-18, Revelation 1:5). And when the resurrected Christ appeared to the Apostles in the upper room, He pointed out to them specifically that He was not just spirit but that He retained flesh and bones in His resurrected state (Luke 24:38-39). There was probably something different about the risen Jesus' appearance. The Apostles didn't dare ask the risen Jesus who He was when He appeared to them in Galilee (John 21:12); Luke and Cleopas didn't recognize Him at all for a while on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). There was undoubtedly something different when the corruptible put on incorruption and the mortal put on immortality. It was changed (1 Corinthians 15:52-54). But yet it was still recognizable on closer inspection.

The Role of the Clay Vessels

So what is the proper role of our fleshly bodies in this life? Irenaeus (2nd Century) quotes Paul using these words with respect to our fleshly bodies: "Paul declares that we are 'always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, that also the life of Jesus Christ might be manifested in our body. For if we who live are delivered into death for Jesus' sake, it is that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh' [2 Corinthians 4:10-11]. And that the Spirit lays hold of the flesh, he says in the same Epistle: 'That ye are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, inscribed not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart' [2 Corinthians 3:3]. If, therefore, in the present time fleshly hearts are made partakers of the Spirit, what is there astonishing if, in the resurrection, they receive that life which is granted by the Spirit? Of this resurrection the Apostle speaks in the Epistle to the Philippians: 'Having been made conformable to His death, if by any means I might attain to the resurrection which is from the dead' [Philippians 3:11]. In what other mortal flesh, therefore, can life be understood, unless in that substance which is also put to death on account of that confession which is made of God. He, Himself has declared: 'If, as a man, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead do not rise? For if the dead do not rise, neither has Christ risen. Now, if Christ has not risen, our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. In that case, we are found to be false witnesses for God, since we testified that He raised up Christ. For if the dead do not rise, neither has Christ risen. But if Christ is not risen, your faith is in vain, since ye are yet in your sins. Therefore those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are more miserable than all men. But now Christ has risen from the dead, the first-fruits of those that sleep; for as by man [came] death, by man also [came] the resurrection of the dead' " [1 Corinthians 15:13-21].

"In all these passages, as I have already said, these men (i.e. the heretics) must either allege that the apostle expresses opinions contradicting himself with respect to that statement 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50); or on the other hand, they will be forced to make perverse and crooked interpretations of all the passages, so as to overturn and alter the sense of the words: (Against Heresies, Book V, chapter 13, 4).

All this was put into place when the Lord created Adam and Eve. Not only were they created in the Image of God, but the Epistle text states that God commanded light to shine out of

darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6). John Chrysostom (4th Century) comments on this: “And where did He command light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the creation; for, says He, ‘Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And God said, let there be light, and there was light’ (Genesis 1:2, 3). Then, He said: ‘Let it be, and it was’; but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us. For He did not say, ‘has now commanded light’, but ‘has Himself shined’ (v.6). Therefore, neither do we see tangible objects by the shining of this light, but we see God Himself through Christ. For of the Spirit, he says (2 Corinthians 3:18): ‘But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord Spirit’. And of the Son, (2 Corinthians 4:4): ‘That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.’ And of the Father (2 Corinthians 4:6): ‘He that said Light shall shine out of darkness shined in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ “.

“For seeing he had spoken many and great things of the unspeakable glory, lest any should say: ‘And how enjoying so great a glory can we remain in a mortal body?’ he said that this very thing is indeed the chief marvel and a very great example of the power of God, that an earthen vessel has been enabled to bear so great a brightness and to keep so high a treasure. None of the things we hold is human!” (Homily viii on 2 Corinthians 4).

“And what is the ‘dying of the Lord Jesus,’ which they bore about? Their daily deaths by which also the resurrection was shown, ‘For if anyone doesn’t believe’, Paul says, ‘that Jesus died and rose again, beholding us every day die and rise again, let him believe henceforward in the resurrection. His life is manifested in our body’ (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). By snatching us out of the perils, that which seems a mark of weakness and being destitute proclaims His resurrection. His power had appeared in that we suffered, but without being overcome. We bear His dying that the power of His life may be made manifest, who did not permit mortal flesh to be overcome by the snowstorm of these calamities” (Homily ix on 2 Corinthians 4).

Attempts to Link the Earthen to the Heavenly

All this is so utterly unfathomable and glorious that there have been attempts in the past to water it down, sometimes by deceit. For example, in the 4th Century, the words of the Nicene Creed were carefully drafted to refute the attempts of the Arian bishops to craft Jesus more in our image rather than vice versa. The words co-essential and consubstantial were used to distinguish the nature of Jesus’ divinity from the nature of Jesus’ flesh — which is the same as ours.

Athanasius of Alexandria (4th Century) put it in these words: “When the Bishops said that the Word must be described as the True Power and image of the Father, in all things exact and like the Father, and as unalterable, and as always, and as in Him without division (for never was the Word not, but He was always, existing everlastingly with the Father, as the radiance of light), Eusebius [an Arian bishop] and his fellows endured indeed, as not daring to contradict, being put to shame by the arguments which were urged against them; but withal they were caught whispering to each other and winking with their eyes [at the Council], that ‘like’, and ‘always’, and ‘power’, and ‘in Him’, were, as before, common to us and the Son and that it was no difficulty to agree to these. As to ‘like’, they said it was written of us, ‘Man is the image and

glory of God' [1 Corinthians 11:7]; 'always', that it was written, 'for we which live are always' [2 Corinthians 4:11]; 'in Him', 'in Him we live and move and have our being' [Acts 17:28]...as to 'power', that the caterpillar and the locust are called 'power' and 'great power' [Joel 2:25], and that it is often said of the people, for instance, 'all the power of the Lord came out of the land of Egypt' [Exodus 12:41]; and there are others also, heavenly ones, for Scripture says, 'the Lord of powers is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge' [Psalms 46:7]...But the Bishops discerning in this too their dissimulation, and whereas it is written, 'deceit is in the heart of the irreligious that imagine evil' [Proverbs 12:20], were again compelled on their part to collect the sense of the Scriptures, and to re-say ... more distinctly still, namely, that the Son is 'one in essence' with the Father, by way of saying, that the Son was from the Father, and not merely like, but the same in likeness, and of showing that the Son's likeness and unalterableness was different from such copy of the same as is ascribed to us, which we acquire from virtue on the ground of observance of the commandments. For bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distances from each other, as are human sons relative to their parents ... but since the generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, and not only like, but inseparable from the essence of the Father, and He and the Father are one, as He has said Himself [John 8:58, 10:30], and the Word is ever in the Father and the Father in the Word, as the radiance stands towards the light ... therefore the Council, as understanding this, suitably wrote 'one in essence', that they might defeat the perverseness of the heretics, and show that the Word was other than the originated things. For, after thus writing, they at once added, 'they who say that the Son of God is from nothing, or created, or alterable, or a work, or from other essence, these the Holy Catholic Church anathematized' " (Athanasius' Defense of the Nicene Definition. The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers).