

## ***RAISING THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN PAUL'S REVELATION***

**October 19, 2014  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Luke  
Revision E**

**Gospel: Luke 7:11-16**

**Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9**

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

## ***PAUL'S REVELATION***

**October 19, 2014**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Revision D**

**Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9**

Today's Epistle is used in the West either on the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost or two Sundays before Lent. In the Orthodox lectionary, today's Epistle lesson is also used for the Feast Day of Peter and Paul on June 29.

The lesson focuses on some of the visions and revelations that the Apostle Paul experienced. These visions were great revelations, but Paul had kept silent about them for 14 years (2 Corinthians 12:2). Since 2 Corinthians was written in 55 AD, this places the time of the revelations in 41 AD, which would be about 7 years after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. Thus the visions occurred while Paul was in Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30) and about 4 years before Barnabas brought him to Antioch to help out with the church there (Acts 11:25-26). For more details of this and for a history of the early life of Paul, see the Epistle lesson for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost.

The Apostle John experienced similar visions and revelations (Revelation 1:10-11, 17, Revelation 4:1-2), which occurred on "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10) or Sunday. (Ignatius in 107 AD wrote the Christians no longer keep the Sabbath but live in accordance with the Lord's Day: Magnesians 9:1). John did not say whether he was bodily translated to heaven (Revelation 4:1-2). Like Paul, he may not have known.

Why did Paul keep silent about these things so long? And why did he break silence at this time? He states that it is not profitable for him to boast of such things (2 Corinthians 12:1). However, the Corinthians had been putting up with others that had boasted (foolishly) of their own visions (2 Corinthians 11:18-20). While Paul was reluctant, he could also see that some of the flock in Corinth were in danger of perishing: those that had not repented from uncleanness, fornications and lewdness (2 Corinthians 12:31). He needed to get their attention regarding the things he had been saying and show them that the Gnostic heretics they had been putting up with hadn't seen what he had seen.

John Chrysostom adds that Paul was caught up into Paradise – at the beginning of his apostleship – so that he might not be inferior to the rest of the Apostles, or seem to be. For they had accompanied Christ but Paul had not (Homily XXVI on 2 Corinthians 12).

The third heaven, which Paul and John saw in their visions, is a term used by First Century Jews to describe heavenly realms. For example, the sun is described as stopping in mid-heaven, or the second heaven, for Joshua (Joshua 10:13). Birds also fly in mid-heaven (Revelation 8:13, 19:17), where the boundaries between the heavens are undoubtedly somewhat blurred.

In order that Paul might not get too conceited concerning his visions, the Lord also gave him a “thorn in the flesh”, “a messenger of Satan” to beat him up. (Greek: *kolaphizo* = to strike with the fist). Much speculation has been made concerning whether this was some physical problem or whether it refers to some people that Paul fought against. Verses 9-10 imply a physical weakness; however, John Chrysostom states that the thorn in the flesh was Alexander the Coppersmith and those with him (Ibid.).

Alexander was most likely the son of Simon of Cyrene, who had been pressed into service to carry Jesus’ cross at the crucifixion (Mark 15:21). Simon and his sons, Alexander and Rufus, were probably among those men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20) who had started the Church in Antioch.

Rufus was in Antioch when Paul and Barnabas were sent off on their First Missionary Journey and when Paul and Silas were sent off on the Second. After the Second Missionary Journey, Rufus was sent to Rome by Peter and Paul and was there when Paul wrote Romans (Romans 16:13). Later Rufus was ordained Bishop of Thebes in Egypt; he was eventually martyred in 107 AD along with Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch.

Alexander chose a different path for himself, however. He was associated with the craftsmen such as Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus (Acts 19:24) who built small idols; he opposed Paul in about 54 AD (Acts 19:33). Later Paul referred to Alexander as a coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14). Yet he rejected the faith. Along with Hymenaeus, Paul felt it necessary to deliver them to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:19-20). They were part of a Gnostic heresy that claimed that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:16-18); this overthrew the faith of some people. Finally, it was Alexander that was primarily responsible for Paul’s martyrdom in about 67 AD (2 Timothy 4:14). Paul warned Timothy to beware of Alexander because he greatly resisted Paul’s words (2 Timothy 4:15). The implication is that he went out of his way to have Paul hunted down, arrested and accused before the Roman authorities.

Whether the “thorn in the flesh” was Alexander or some physical weakness, Paul asked the Lord three times to remove it (2 Corinthians 12:8). But each time, the Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul’s example is a good lesson for us today. Whether we have had visions of the Lord in glory or not, the Lord will put limits on us so that we don’t get too exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7). That way the Lord gets the glory for the achievements and His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). From Paul’s point of view, he took pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions and distresses for Christ’s sake (2 Corinthians 12:10). For being weak, then he was strong.

## Messengers of Satan

The term “messenger of Satan” (or angel of Satan) needs further clarification. We note that Paul’s “weakness”, whether physical or personal was “a messenger from Satan” (v.7). The life of Job also contains illustrations of both physical and personal messengers from Satan. Job was a descendant of Esau who lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. His ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth “a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8). Job even offered prayers and offerings for his ten children consecrating them just in case they had sinned in their heart (Job 1:6). Satan felt that if Job were poor and destitute, Job would curse God to His face (Job 1:11). So the Lord allowed Satan to send several “messengers” his way.

First the Sabeans attacked and took all Job’s oxen and donkeys, killing Job’s herdsmen in the process (Job 1:14-15). Second, “the fire of God” fell from heaven and burned up all the sheep, killing the shepherds with the sheep (Job 1:16). Third, the Chaldean raiders came and took all Job’s camels, killing the keepers who were defending. Lastly, while Job’s children were having a feast at the house of the oldest son “on his day” (probably his birthday, Job 1:4) a great wind came from across the wilderness, collapsing the house on top of them and killing them all (Job 1:18-19). Thus these messengers were two personal ones (the Sabeans and the Chaldeans) and two miraculous ones (the fire of God and the great wind). Today’s insurance industry would refer to these last two as “acts of God” even though their source is an act of Satan.

Job’s response to all this was to prepare himself to worship the Lord saying, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Meanwhile, the Lord pointed out to Satan that Job held fast to his integrity “even though you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause” (Job 2:3). Satan replied that if Job were plagued with diseases on his bone and his flesh, he would curse God to His face (Job 2:5). So the Lord allowed Satan to send more “messengers” to Job.

The next “messenger from Satan” was a physical one: “severe boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (Job 2:7). Now destitute and unable to afford any medical attention, Job’s only medical alternative was scrapping the pus off his skin with a piece of broken pottery. Completely disfigured by these diseases, Job’s wife advised him: “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Just curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). When three of his friends came to see him after hearing of his adversity, they didn’t even recognize him at first because of his disfigurement. When they did, they openly wept (Job 2:11-12). Following this, they sat down with him for seven days without saying a word, for they saw that his pain was very great (Job 2:13). For Job, it was so bad he wished he had never been born (Job 3:1).

Following this came the last messenger: the inquisition. Job’s three friends thought that Job had some secret sin that brought all this evil down on his own head. Eliphaz the Temanite suggested that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble harvest it. The innocent and upright don’t perish for no reason (Job 4:7-8). Bilhad the Shuhite suggested that perhaps Job’s sons had sinned and had gotten their just reward. If Job, himself were without guilt, surely God would have, by now, restored his righteous estate. After all, God will not reject a man of integrity nor

will He support evil doers (Job 8:4, 6, 20). Job claimed he was innocent. Zephan the Naamathite suggested that the Lord knows false men without investigating their circumstances. “If you would direct your heart right and spread out your hand to Him (that is, in prayer); if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let wickedness dwell in your tents (Job 11:4, 11-14). The effect of all this on Job was that “the tents of the destroyers prosper while the just and blameless man is a joke (Job 12:4, 6).

This last messenger from Satan was perhaps the cruelest and the most difficult to deal with. After all, there was ample evidence all around Job that it was true! Chrysostom commented that “the reproaches of Job’s friends appeared more grievous than the worms and the sores. For there is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable of stinging the soul” (Homily XII on 2 Corinthians 6). This is exactly what the “messengers of Satan” seek to convince us of also: that God is not faithful, that He doesn’t care about us and that we should only trust in what we can see.

Paul reminds us that the usefulness of our “thorns in the flesh” or “messengers of Satan” are that we don’t get exalted above measure (v.7). After all, we are to bear our crosses as our Lord bore His (Mark 8:34-37), and as He humbled Himself to death on the Cross, so should we. The Lord told Paul, and He tells us, “My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (v.9). Going through all he went through, it’s hard to imagine the Lord’s grace being sufficient for Job; but it was. Paul also said, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Lord saw His Cross (which itself was a messenger of Satan) as His Glory (John 12:23). Job wasn’t aware of what was going on in heaven between the Lord and Satan, but eventually He realized that his ordeal was for his glory also. And as a result, Job was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11).