

MT. ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Pentecost 3

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Luke 7:11-17

LIVE IN AWE OF GOD'S MERCY

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Off the top of your head, how many different TV shows can you think of that are faith based? Perhaps you can come up with shows like, "Touched by an Angel" "Seventh Heaven" "Joan of Arcadia". These shows seem nice and pleasant and innocent enough, so much so, in fact, that we can easily miss how subtly they disrespect the Lord. The writers and actors on the show may not mean to, but when they preach earning your way to

eternal life all on your own and portray Jesus as just another role model, they diminish all that he has done, they disrespect his work.

Then there are other shows that aren't so subtle. They don't accidentally get the message wrong. They purposely try to bash the Bible into the ground. They will mock Christians in general, portraying them as foolish dreamers who have no sense of reality. They may even portray Christ as an indecisive and out of touch crowd pleaser, no different than all other religious leaders of the world.

So our faith is under attack. I assume that most of you know this already. It's probably fair to say that all of us here wish that our Lord were treated with more respect in this world. But what can we do to stem the tide of blasphemy, disinterest and misrepresentation? Wouldn't it be great if we could conjure up a miracle like the one our Lord performed in this text, so that people would be **"filled with awe"** and praise God? While that's certainly a noble sentiment because it concerns itself with God and his glory, I think you'll find that the lesson a Christian draws from a deeper look at this text has more to do with God's response to sinners – his mercy. Live in awe of His mercy, and pray that others would be led to see God's mercy for all people, including themselves.

Think about it. Even if people in general aren't prone to pay a lot of attention to Christ, do you think they would be as likely to openly blaspheme him if someone they admired was known to hold the Lord in high esteem? For example, if someone you looked up to loved lighthouses and was known to study them, would you be more likely to say that lighthouses are dull and boring and are a thing of the past, or would you be more likely to listen to that person and even learn that lighthouses, like the red one on Kenosha's shoreline, are still used to guide ships to safety today? It's no different with our faith. We shine the light of Jesus to others! If we are not a role model of his love, if they don't see that light, then how can they be guided? How can they too live in awe of God's mercy – especially if they don't see it in us!

Our Lord is often slighted in the society. Are you part of that problem or part of the cure? Are you always and obviously respectful of Jesus? Or does his name sometimes pass your lips as a swear word? Is it a big deal when you say, "God"? Does your life in general come off as respectable enough that people would really care about how they spoke about your God around you? These are very tough questions to put to ourselves, aren't they?

Notice how the Good News about Jesus was spread according to the gospel of Luke. After Jesus raised the young man from the dead, the people **"were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help his people.' This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country."**

The people there that day witnessed a miracle and were struck with awe. Their lives would never be the same after what they saw. There was just no way. It was too awesome. They just had to tell people about it. They had to spread the news. They had to talk about how great God was to have mercy on this widow and display such power in helping her.

How different that is from feeling that the only reason you really have to tell someone about Jesus is that you don't want to feel guilty about it afterward if you don't! I mean, it's not that you don't believe in Jesus. You call him your Savior and honestly believe that is true. But how *changed* does your life feel day to day? Are you so awed by the Lord's mercy and power that you just *have* to tell people? Not just that you don't want to feel guilty afterward about not telling them, but that it doesn't even occur to you not to tell them because you just *have* to tell people about how awesome the Lord is! Come on! Souls are at stake here!

I need you to understand that I'm not trying to whip you into submission here. It's impossible to truly live in awe of God's mercy when you're afraid of his wrath. No, the "guilt trip" I'm laying on you is not intended as an incentive to serve, but as

an incentive to seek that very mercy that I've been talking about, because that mercy changes lives. That mercy will produce its own awe in you.

The mercy of God that changes lives is shown primarily in the fact that he came to this earth to save us. Remember what the people said after being struck with awe by Jesus' miracle? **"God has come to help his people."** The expression they used for "coming to help" was used very commonly for any kind of help offered by God, whether in person or through a messenger or natural phenomenon, so I doubt that the people realized the true significance of their words. But, truly, how significant! God *had* come into the world to help his people! This was the crowning glory of his salvation plan: God in the flesh, living perfectly in our place, succeeding in all the ways that we have failed!

Perhaps we're spoiled by it. I mean, to these people the tender mercy and mind-boggling power of God was shocking. Who ever had seen a person come back from the dead like that? For us, though, the story of Jesus and what he did for us, as wonderful as it is, is an old story that billions of people have already heard. That's right, billions of people have heard, and what has it changed? Billions of people have heard this message, and yet the world is still torn by war, still full of hungry people, still full of "fat cats," still full of the oppressed.

Or, to make it more personal, we could focus on ourselves. We've heard this message over and over, and yet our lives are still filled with struggles. We know he died for our sins, but he still doesn't wash away our financial debts. We still get sick, get stressed. Our loved ones still die or lose their minds. We still don't have perfect marriages or perfect kids—or perfect parents, for that matter. We can hear about him declaring us not guilty up in heaven, but doesn't he care about our broken relationships? Our unreturned feelings of love? Our everyday hardships?

Please, look with me at the miracle that perhaps you didn't notice the first time through the account. The Lord came to a town and what did he see? He saw a young man who was dead. He saw a widow who was now not only bereaved of the two most important people in her world, but now would be socially destitute because she couldn't earn any money or have a voice. He saw a crowd that was large, very large because it was the funeral of a young man. A tragedy to all who heard about it.

So what's the miracle? **"When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'"** Does this sound to you like a God whose only interest is satisfying his idea of justice? He didn't look at tragedy and say, "You know, this isn't really *that* sad. It's really just a blip in the eternal scheme of things." No! **"His heart went out to her."**

Mercy, my friends. God is a God of *mercy*. He isn't merely concerned about settling moral accounts and balancing the eternal books of justice. If that were the case, he would have just cast us all into hell—we've all committed the sins to deserve it! But marvel in his mercy! Though he is driven to anger when he considers our sins, he is even more driven to pity by our plight, our sadness. He is not just concerned about our moral debt, but is moved by our every suffering.

So why doesn't he care about our everyday struggles and conflicts? Who says he doesn't? He give us His meal of mercy where he personally comes to us with forgiveness to strengthen our everyday lives. He gives us baptism to remind us we are his washed and forgiven child that he truly cares about. He whose heart was so deeply moved at the sight of the widow of Nain is still moved when he sees our lives tested and our relationships strained. He sits at the right hand of God and guides all things, carefully considering whether the struggle that weighs upon you so heavily is necessary. And, to him, necessary can only mean "beneficial"—that is, does it bring you closer to him? When you do suffer pain, you'll know it must be for your benefit, and that his tender mercy felt it first!

Awesome, isn't it? It's also the answer to the life of the church. The better we understand it, the more struck by his awe we are, and the more we are naturally compelled to spread the news about Jesus. And not only are we more likely to speak, but as we live in awe of his mercy, people are more likely to listen. We ourselves become the miracle that strikes people with awe, for we are the ones that have died and come back to life, from slavery to freedom, from sadness to joy/contentment in Christ. We pray that others are then moved to praise our Father in heaven. That by his Word they too live in awe of God's mercy. Amen.