

His Heart Went Out to Her

Luke 7:11-17

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There is a phrase in the psalms that is meant to convey the awesomeness of God, the hard to grasp reality that God is not limited by time. “For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by.” Psalm 90:4 The second letter of Peter draws on that eternal truth to encourage the people who have grown weary with waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter writes, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends; with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” II Peter 3:8 Now wouldn’t you know it, some jokester took this eternal truth about God and had a little fun with it. And he made the joke about a preacher. Why is it always about the preacher?

A preacher went into his church and he was praying to God. While he was praying, he asked God, “How long is 10 million years to you?”

God replied, “One second.”

The next day the preacher asked God, ‘How much is 10 million dollars to you?’

And God replied, “A penny.”

Armed with this knowledge the preacher came before the Lord on the third day and said, “God, can I have one of your pennies?”

And God replied, “Wait a second.”

On this Mother’s Day, which unfortunately for many is a “Virtual” Mother’s Day, we are presented in the gospel of Luke with a mother who has had her heart ripped out. Jesus is entering a town called Nain when he encounters a dead person being carried out of the town, presumably to be buried. We are told the dead person was the only son of his mother. We also learn the mother was a widow. She lost her husband and now she lost her son. For all the mothers who have ever had their heart ripped out, in all the ways a mother can have her heart ripped out, including the heart-wrenching agony of losing a child, or in this case a son, an only son, for all the mothers who have had their heart ripped out, we are told this about Jesus. “His heart went out to the mother.” And here is what Jesus did not say. Jesus did not say, “Wait a second.” Jesus did not tell the mourning mother, “Wait a second.” Instead, Jesus said, “Don’t cry.” And then he set about doing a miracle. As soon as Jesus saw the dead person and his devastated mother Jesus acted immediately. He told the mother “Don’t cry.” He told the son, “Get up.” Which he did. Having raised the son from

the dead Jesus then gave the son back to his mother. For every mother who knows the immense pain of having your heart ripped out, this story is for you. Jesus sees the mother's pain. His heart went out to her. He stopped her crying. He raised her son. He gave her son back to her. And not once in the whole process did Jesus say, "Wait a second."

From his baptism in the Jordan River to his death on the cross, the public ministry of Jesus lasted roughly three years. In just three years Jesus performed the many and marvelous miracles and ministries that have brought healing and salvation to this broken world. To do this Jesus did not spend a lot of time telling people, "Wait a second." Those who study the bible note that there is an oft used word in the gospels. That word is, "Immediately." The bible is very comfortable moving at a slow pace. Abraham and Sarah wait for years for the birth of Isaac. The nation of Israel suffers their slavery in Egypt for what feels like forever. The wilderness journey takes four decades. The span of time from Abraham to Jesus is some 200 centuries. And we are not even talking about those ancient figures like Methuselah who lived 969 years. The bible is very comfortable moving at a slow pace. But when Jesus appears the gospel writers pick up the pace. Things happen immediately.

The word immediately occurs 54 times in the whole bible. Matthew, Mark, and Luke account for 33 of those occurrences. There is not much "Wait a second" happening when Jesus appears on the scene.

- Immediately disciples leave their nets and their boats.
- When Jesus reaches out his hand the leper is made clean immediately.
- On the storm-tossed sea the frightened disciples saw a strange figure walking on the water. Jesus immediately said to the disciples, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."
- When Peter leaped out of the boat to walk with Jesus on the water, only to sink, "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him."
- When Jesus touched the eyes of the blind, they received their sight immediately.
- A woman's bleeding stopped immediately when she reached out and touched Jesus.

And when Jesus saw the dead son, the only son of the widow of Nain being taken outside the city to be buried, Jesus did not say, "Wait a second." Jesus acted immediately. In just a few verses we learn his heart went out, he stopped the crying, he raised the dead son, and he gave that son back to his mother. What's not to like

in this story? What's not to make our hearts leap for joy? When Jesus sees this woman in her deep despair, his heart goes out to her. Jesus brings the healing that makes her whole. And not once in this entire narrative does Jesus say, "Wait a second."

What's not to like in this story? If we are honest, it becomes painfully obvious what's not to like in this story. What's not to like is that there are moments in our lives, critical moments, crucial moments, moments of crisis, moments of the utmost concern, moments when we cry out to God, when we pray to and through Jesus Christ our Lord, there are moments in our lives when for all world it feels like Jesus says to us, "Wait a second." We pour our hearts out to God for healing, for relief, for reconciliation, and yes, when we lose a loved one, we cry out for resurrection. We cry out to God and for whatever reason it feels like Jesus says, "Wait a second." And the second we wait for feels like an eternity. For many it has certainly lasted a lifetime, that waiting. A child remains dead. A relationship remains broken. A dream remains crushed. A hope remains unfulfilled. We wait a second, and that second stretches on, and we wonder...is Jesus ever going to answer my prayer, is Jesus ever going to heal my brokenness, is Jesus ever going to bind up my wounded heart, is Jesus ever going to make right what is wrong?

The story of the widow from Nain is found in the Gospel of Luke, the 7th chapter. Up to this point Jesus has been doing a lot of good, and he has been doing a lot of good immediately. John the Baptist is about to receive a report that through Jesus the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Through the first seven chapters in the Gospel of Luke Jesus has been doing a whole lot of good, and he has been doing a whole lot of good immediately. Then in Luke chapter 9, there is a subtle and yet extremely significant shift. We are told in Luke nine that, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51) When Jesus sets his face resolutely toward Jerusalem, we can almost imagine him saying to all the immediate needs that surround him, that confront him, that cry out to him, we can almost imagine Jesus saying to all the immediate and urgent needs, "Wait a second."

It is not because Jesus does not care about those urgent and immediate needs that he says, "Wait a second." Rather, it is because Jesus knows the only way to answer all the urgent and immediate needs is through his journey to the cross. That is why Jesus says, "Wait a second." Jesus goes to Jerusalem. Jesus goes to the cross. Jesus goes to his suffering and his death, because he knows the only way to make this broken world whole is through what he will do when he gives his life. The Messiah has to suffer, just ask those two travelers on the Road to Emmaus. "Wait a second." All this sadness and suffering, death and dying, just wait a second. I'm going to the cross to fix it, to fix it all, and to fix it for eternity.

And he does. Boy does he ever fix everything for all eternity. You read something like Revelation chapter 21, when there is a new heaven and a new earth, a new heaven and a new earth brought to us by none other than the Lion of the tribe of Judah who was in reality the Lamb that was slain, when you look at that new heaven and new earth, you realize when Jesus said, “Wait a second” and went to the cross, he answered every prayer we could have ever prayed about every sadness and sorrow and suffering and loss we could have ever experienced. “Wait a second.” I am going to go to the cross and I am going to fix it all. And boy does he ever fix it all. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus we can hold on to the sure and confident hope that one day we will be with God and God will be with us and, “He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-5)

It seems like we have two good options today. Option one is Jesus acts immediately, the boy is raised from the dead, and Jesus hands him back to his mother. In Option two Jesus says, “Wait a second” and in God’s good timing one day that dead child will live again, reunited with his mother in the wonderful new creation where there is no more sadness, no more sorrow, no more suffering, and no more pain. Option one is wonderful. So is option two. Option two is wonderful and yet it does leave us with the dilemma of how we live during the time of waiting. Every parent who has lost a child, every person who has lost a loved one, comes face to face with the challenge of figuring out how we live while we wait, how we live while our hearts are broken and our dreams are dashed. How do we live while we “Wait a second” for Jesus to make all things right?

I wonder if the widow at Nain might help us in our time of waiting. There is something in her story that I know would not change no matter what. When Jesus sees her weeping over her dead son, we are told his heart went out to her. Knowing he was going to raise the boy immediately, still his heart went out to the widow. How much more would the heart of Jesus go out to a grieving person when he knows he is going to tell them, “Wait a second.” Jesus knows human pain and human loss. You better believe that when Jesus sees us grieving, and he knows we are going to have to “Wait a second”, you just know that his heart goes out to us. Jesus cares. That is the reason he set his face toward Jerusalem. Jesus cares for us and loves us so much he gives his life for us. When we have to “Wait a second,” there is no doubt the heart of Jesus goes out to us.

If we do have to “Wait a second”, I think there is something in the story that would change. If Jesus told us, “Wait a minute”, I think something in the story would be different. Jesus says to the weeping widow, “Don’t cry.” That was his message because something miraculous was going to happen immediately. But if we were going to have to “Wait a second”, it just seems so clear to me that Jesus would not say, “Don’t cry.” Jesus was not afraid of tears and Jesus was not ashamed of tears.

Jesus accepted the tears of a weeping woman. Jesus shed his own tears at the grave of his dear friend Lazarus. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.” I do not think Jesus says to those of us who have to “Wait a second”, I do not think Jesus tells us, “Don’t cry.” I think Jesus comes right alongside us. I think Jesus comes near and holds us close. I think Jesus wraps us up in his arms of love. I think Jesus whispers words of comfort and words of care. And I think Jesus weeps with us. He shares our sorrow. He mingles his tears with ours.

“Wait a second.” It’s just down the road. I know it feels like forever to you, but it is really just a second. “Wait a second” and God will make it right. God will make it all right. And while you wait, while you wait that second that can feel like an eternity, know that you are not waiting alone. Jesus has come to be with you. His heart goes out to you. His heart goes out to you and his tears mingle with your tears. “Wait a second.” While you wait, know that the Lord is right by your side, crying with you until that great day when every tear is dried. Amen.