

# Third Sunday after Pentecost

## DIVINE INTERVENTION

Luke 7:11-17

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

11Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. 12As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. 13When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" 15The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" 17This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Benign Divine Neglect

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *The Pall of Death*  
Death comes to us all. It is inevitable—and was even more so in Jesus' day. And so the widow in Nain and her companions did what people do when visited by death: They prepared her son's body, they lamented privately and ceremonially, and they processed with the body outside the gate of the city to bury it. No doubt the widow received peoples' sympathy--doubly so, because 1) she was a widow, and 2) this was her only son; which meant she had

no one to care for her now. The pall of her son's death would likely plague her for the rest of her life.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *The Stink of Life***

Such destitute circumstances were sad, but more common than one might think. And, really, there was nothing to be done about it, except regret that the poor woman was up life's creek without a paddle. This was simply the way life worked out for some people: the social fabric of first-century Israel just couldn't hold up everyone, so this widow was one of those who fell through. An unfortunate casualty of life's hard knocks—the very hard knocks that the prophets had warned were unacceptable to Israel's God. Such prophecy must have haunted the ears of these funeral marchers. How could a God who planned to bring good news to the poor (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18), deliver such desperate circumstances to this woman?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *God Turns a Blind Eye?***

Maybe she was taught to believe piously that she had brought these circumstances upon herself; that she had fallen into God's disfavor by something she had done or left undone. Perhaps she could explain her lot by holding her neighbors accountable for their dispassionate inaction, and let God off the hook. Or, maybe the problem was that God had simply turned a blind eye. Regardless, the effect was the same.

**PROGNOSIS: Divine Intervention**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *God Has Looked Favorably upon His People!***

Curious then that Jesus shows up at the very place where people might believe God has looked away. And, while others are giving this funeral procession a wide berth, Jesus walks right into the midst of the grief and shows compassion (v. 13). Not only that,

but he gives the widow back her son. To which the people respond, "God has looked favorably on his people!" But, while Jesus' compassion impresses the crowd (seizes them with fear, v. 14) so that they glorify God, it really only affects the singular widow whose son has been raised. What's to become of all those widows whose sons will not be raised from death? That grief can only be met by a bigger compassion than this one son's raising. So we turn our eyes toward the cross of God's only Son, Jesus, who shows compassion by walking right into the pit of grief and death with us. Here, in his crucified glory, we see Jesus' more divine intervention—not for one life, but for all—by giving up his life so that forgiveness and paradise are received even by the most undeserving candidates (23:39-43). And, having died the death he didn't deserve, he earns the new life he does deserve—and then shares it, that we may marvel at God's unwarranted favor.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *A Fragrant Offering for Us***

Such kindness can only cause the undeserving beneficiaries of God's grace to look at life more sweetly. We might even be inclined to join with the one-time pall-bearers in this Gospel lesson, exclaiming, "God has looked favorably on his people!" Certainly, we have received more than we could imagine or deserve. Christ's generosity on the cross is a fragrant offering for us. And doesn't life smell (taste, feel) sweeter because of it?! (Maybe even as sweet as it was for that widow that day when Jesus raised her son!)

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Sweetness of Life***

So sweet is this new life, made possible by Christ, that we wouldn't dream of stinking it up with our benign neglect. Instead, the sweetness of Christ's offering, makes us want to share our own: So we don't simply accept that "life is tough all

over.” Instead, we walk into the midst of people’s griefs and woes offering whatever we can give: comfort, kindness, mercy, advocacy, dignity, and trust in the One who gave it all.