

“Transformation”

Luke 7:11-17 & Acts 2:Selected Phrases

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

The Holy Spirit who created and sustains the cosmos fills each of us with life, love, and the ability to make all glorious. The Holy Spirit is giving each of us all we need to solve every issue facing the world. The Holy Spirit is eager to transform every situation, every person, into perfect glory. The Holy Spirit is eager to give us the joy, glory, and majesty of God. The Holy Spirit is eager to unite all in harmonious love.

Jesus swallowed death with glorious resurrection life. Jesus mends every relationship. Jesus graciously cleans up all of our messes. Jesus guides us through every painful, awful season.

God is our shepherd who restores our soul. God leads us through every form of death to fulfilling green pastures. God pours goodness, grace, and blessings into our life. Surely, we all will dwell in the house of God forever.

No matter how dire the situation we can have hope, because God is constantly demonstrating God's steadfast everlasting love that redeems every situation.

Scripture often convicts us of our oppressive systems and names faults in our politics. The intent of this sermon is to not promote any political view over another rather to proclaim that when we all serve together, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we can solve every problem. In our gospel lesson, Jesus is redeeming broken aspect of society, culture, religion, and institutions. The chapter begins with Jesus healing the slave of a Roman officer. **Luke 7:11-17 NLT** “Soon afterward Jesus went with his disciples to the village of Nain, and a large crowd followed Jesus. A funeral procession was coming out as Jesus approached the village gate. The young man who had died was a widow's only son, and a large crowd from the village was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. “Don't cry!” Jesus said. Then Jesus walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. “Young man,” Jesus said, “I tell you, get up.” Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk! And Jesus gave him back to his mother. Great fear swept the crowd, and they praised God, saying, “A mighty prophet has risen among us,” and “God has visited God's people today.” And the news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding countryside.

God is transforming, redeeming, resurrecting death, every form of death, and all of our broken systems, culture, religion, and institutions. Jesus resurrected a dead man. God's resurrection miracles sometimes distract us from the other miracles that are happening. The focus of this account is the widow. A widow's son had died, which was a double tragedy. Not only would this woman have been grieving deeply over the loss of her only son, but the funeral procession also meant that her own future was likely on the way out as well since she would have no one to support her. She lived in a season when women were oppressed. Jesus is naming this oppression and is redeeming the widow and all women.

Every aspect of this account is pointing to the widow's plight. Jesus overflowed with compassion for the widow. Jesus told the widow, “Don't cry.” Jesus resurrected the son to give him back to the widow, to redeem the widow's life. The miracle Luke wants you to perceive is redemption for the widow.

What did this young man say that swept fear through the crowd and caused the crowd to declare that Jesus is a great prophet. Prophets speak God's will. Prophets advocate for the poor and oppressed. Prophets name problems facing humanity. Prophets denounce corruption, broken relationship, corrupt systems, biased institutions, cultural inequalities, and the twisting of religion by humanity. Prophets point out humanity's sinful ways. Perhaps people were filled with fear and declared Jesus a prophet because this young man was naming the plight of his mother, the plight of women, who were being oppressed. Perhaps they were afraid, because they realized they were sinful, a part of an oppressive society. Perhaps they declared Jesus a prophet, because he had the courage to name the oppression and is redeeming oppressive systems.

Another aspect of this account to notice is Jesus touching the coffin. In those days, religion declared that touching a coffin makes one unclean and would require a week of ritual cleaning before one could rejoin the community. God often completely reverses human expectations. Jesus did not become unclean, rather Jesus made the

young man clean. Jesus' life was not diminished by touching the coffin, rather God's life resurrected the young man. Death is always overcome with life.

We struggle with negative expectations. God is constantly reversing them. Humanity often sees scarcity. God provides abundance. Humanity judges. God forgives. Humanity divides. God unites. Humanity wallows in suffering. God provides joy. Humanity gets overwhelmed with problems. God is providing solutions. Humanity makes oppressive systems. God frees everyone.

Theologian John Shea wrote: "The central characters of the story are Jesus and the widow. The dead and risen son is merely the medium of exchange between them. Jesus' compassion is for the widow and Jesus words, "Weep not," reflect the astounding social reversal of the Sermon on the Plain. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. But Jesus' compassion extends beyond the fact that this woman has lost her son. She is also a widow who has lost a husband, making her an unprotected woman without a husband or son. In the society of Jesus' day, she is completely vulnerable. She does not belong to the house of a man, so she is without shelter and food. She may be weeping for her lost son, but her tears could legitimately include herself. Jesus has encountered a burial procession for two. She is leaving the village to be buried with her son. This is a story of how culture and society abandon women without men. It is this meaning that is revelation, the compassion of God for the poor and vulnerable. Once the compassion of God for the poor and vulnerable is noted, this story takes us into the cultural conditions that create the poor and vulnerable. The healings of Jesus are as much social critiques as they are miracles. They reveal divine compassion and love and at the same time, unmask the social conditions that turn people into the poor and vulnerable, invisible, and oppressed. But this revelation is resisted. Pander to the miracle. Even ponder the strange compassion of God on the least. But do not bring out of concealment the cultural assumptions and social mechanisms that shape deprivation and death. Too much is at stake." The insights of John Shea.

Assumptions are hidden persuaders. Many times, one is unaware of assumptions. Collectively through culture, systems, institutions, and religion we teach assumptions. Walter Wink names a few of our delusional assumptions: "The need to control society and prevent chaos requires some to dominate others. Those who dominate may use other people as means to achieve their goals. Men are better equipped by nature to be dominant than women and some races are naturally suited to dominate others. Institutions are more important than people." John Shea adds the follow to our list of delusional assumptions. "People on top work harder and so should be paid more. Never share information that gives you an edge. Never admit mistakes. Whatever you do to someone is justified because they might do it to you. Wishing people well is enough. Some people are just unlucky. Everyone gets what one deserves."

What delusional assumptions would you add to the list? These assumptions have a tremendous force on us; however God is reversing them. Jesus did not become unclean when he touched the coffin. The young man became clean enjoying resurrection.

Over time, systems can become monsters that seem to take on a life of their own. Systems seem incapable of change. However, humanity creates the systems. Humanity can change the systems. The Holy Spirit is eager to help us change every life diminishing system.

John Steinbeck describes systems in the *Grapes of Wrath*. "If a bank owned the land, the owner man said, the bank needs, wants, insists, must have as though the bank were a monster with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them. And the owner man explained the working and things of the monster that was stronger than they were. The bank has to have profits all the time. The bank can't wait. The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank, does and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men. Men made the bank, but they can't control it."

John Shea concludes: "People create the systems that eventually turn and imprison them. But they forget this fact and obey the monster made from their own hands. Of all the titles of Jesus, one of the most provocative is "peddler of choices". Jesus revealed both the grace of God and the oppression of people, and this double revelation created a world of choices. People were able to see the assumptions and systems that curtailed their lives and so they were given the possibility of saying no." John Shea continues. "I like to think that when the young man began to talk, he said what young men are supposed to say. With his resurrection eyes he saw the world clearly and criticized things that should never be. It was only then he was sure he had come back from the dead."

What monster systems have we created that we need to change? Mass shootings, income inequality, war, discrimination, climate change, violence against someone for worshiping in their preferred style. What other monsters have we created? What are the assumptions that feed these monsters? God is eager to help us get rid of every monster, to transform every system.

Have hope, a confident expectancy, that all systems, culture, institutions, and religion will be transformed, redeemed, resurrected, perfect and glorified. Do not have apathy that ignores the problem or fails to take action to

create transformational change. Have hope that is active, serving, loving, healing, working to change every monstrous system.

Today we celebrate Pentecost the creative power of the cosmos that continually is in us and flows through us, the transformation force that is making all glorious, the conduit of joy and love, the healer, redeemer, savior, the uniter who gives each person love, each person a unique gift and who weaves us all together to solve every problem.

Acts 2:Select Phrases NLT “On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!” They stood there amazed and perplexed.”

Transformation happens when we see the world through each other's eyes. Transformation happens when you understand everyone's language and everyone understands you. Transformation happens when liberal and conservative, republican and democrat, rich and poor understand each other. Only by perceiving all perspectives are we able to see the full scope of the problem. The most critical step to solving any problem is getting everyone to acknowledge the full scope of the problem. Often our solutions fail because each group is trying to solve only a fragment of the problem. The Holy Spirit is giving us the ability to understand each other, to perceive the world, the situation, through everyone's perception. When we perceive the faults in our systems, when we name the monsters, we can work together to transform them. Each person has a perspective, a gift, a solution, to every issue. Humanity has created the monsters, the systems. We can transform them. God is eager to help.

The 19th-century evangelist Dwight L. Moody was once asked to preach a funeral sermon. He searched the gospels to find a funeral sermon that Jesus himself had preached. Moody wrote: "I hunted through the four gospels trying to find one of Christ's funeral sermons, but I couldn't find any. I found he broke up every funeral he ever attended! He never preached a funeral sermon in the world. Death couldn't exist where Jesus was. When the dead heard Jesus' voice, they sprang to life." The gospel points us to this promise. One day, all funerals will be canceled forever."

Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber preached: "That's the thing about tombs. Sometimes we don't even know we are in them, until the light breaks from on high. But I know we all have them. I wonder what it is for you. Is there something buried? Thought to be dead? Something that you have left for dead. What in your life might have been in such darkness that any kind of dawn would feel sudden and unexpected causing you to shield your eyes? Sometimes tombs are about how we treat things in our life as though they represent the end. This relationship is over. This life of faith has ended. That time of happiness will never return. There's a big stone covering that thing I used to feel or I used to love or I used to be and anyway, it's started to smell of rot. That part of me is totally dead, period. End of sentence. But as great African American preachers often say -- "where we put a period ... God puts a comma." Having a God of resurrection means that the story is seldom over when we think it is."

The Holy Spirit will help us transform every tomb into glorious resurrection, every tear into joy, every monster into blessings, every oppressive system into a system of freedom, every negative assumption into affirmation for all, every broken relationship into a loving expanding relationship. Pentecost happened in the second chapter of Acts, the book that tells the history of the early church. Pentecost was an experience that inspired every person in the church to action, to actively change the world. The Holy Spirit continues to call each of us, to join with all people, to transform the world to complete goodness. Let us celebrate and get to work. Amen