

Women of the Bible: Widow of Nain

Pilgrim Lutheran Church Mary/Martha Society Gathering – 2026 August 16

Rev. Dr. Jayson S. Galler, Pastor

- Invocation and Prayer
- Last time, July 19, 2026, we considered the sinful Samaritan Woman at the Well, who came to yearn for and share with others the Living Water that flows from our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus encountered her at some point in His earthly ministry, as He at some point later in His earthly ministry encountered the Widow of Nain, whom we consider today (for example, see the sequence of the pericopes in the *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*). And, as we have noted on other occasions, the widow's not being named does not mean that she is any less important than other women who are named. (See the page on Pilgrim's website with the working chronological list of all the women whom we both have studied and will study, linking our handouts when available: www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/women-of-the-bible.)
- Jesus's encounter with the Widow of Nain is narrated in Luke 7:11-17. (*Lutheran Service Book's* Three-Year Lectionary Series appoints Luke 7:11-17 as the Gospel Reading for Proper 5 C, the set of Propers appointed for the Sunday that falls on June 5-11 in the C year of *LSB's* Three-Year Series, for which Sunday the appointed Old Testament Reading is 1 Kings 17:17-24, about Elijah's revivifying the son of the Widow of Zarephath, as noted below, and the appointed Psalm is Psalm 30, with weeping for the night but joy coming in the morning and mourning being turned into dancing, sackcloth being loosed and being clothed with gladness. [Proper 5C was used in 2013 and 2016 but not 2019, 2022, or 2025.]
- Some notes may help us understand and apply the account:
 - V.11:** What the ESV translates as "Soon afterward" is "the next day" in some manuscripts. Jesus might be said to have been led to Nain by the Holy Spirit. Nain is southwest of Capernaum on the plain of Jezreel (for any Hosea fans out there).
 - V.12:** The Greek begins with a conjunction that could suggest contrast "but" (as He is trying to go into Nain, He runs into this other crowd). "Behold" is a sign-post for something important that follows. The ESV translates "man", but the participle indicating the death is only masculine with no indication of the deceased's age (confer/compare "young man" in v.14 and "dead" in v.15). We should think of death as the consequence for our sin. "The only son" in Greek can be "only begotten", especially in St. John's account, uniquely of Jesus (other "only children" are also mentioned in Luke 8:42 and 9:38). That the mother of an only son was already a widow, perhaps recognizable by her clothing, indicates how important the only son was to her long-term provision and protection and what kind of loss the woman had already suffered before having to bury her son. (One commentator says a worse blow could not have struck her.) The considerable crowd from the town may reflect its love for the widow and/or for the deceased son (or they could be hired professional mourners). Admittedly we are not told much about the widow herself but we see God's and others' love for her, and her love for others, including her only son.

- V.13:** This verse is the first time the Divinely-inspired St. Luke refers to Jesus as “the Lord”. The Lord’s “compassion” is the gut-wrenching movement of love and pity ascribed in the New Testament only to God. The man Jesus might think of what His Virgin Mother will have to deal with (the sword that pierces her soul?), but the compassion is that of the Son of God, the Messiah. The command to not weep can have the sense “Stop weeping”, and He is about to give her reason to stop (more immediately than our reasons not to weep when our loved ones predecease us).
- V.14:** Jesus’s touching the bier (the open coffin or portable frame on which the body was laid) might be said to “contaminate” Him, but His touch is narrated as stopping the bearers. Jesus’s command to the young man is arguably what revivifies him. That the deceased is addressed as “young man” can suggest he is a younger man, a youth, one recently born (maybe prime of life). What the ESV translates “Arise” might be translated better “be raised”. Note that Jesus arguably uses His own authority; He is not praying for the Father or Spirit to raise the deceased. One greater than both Elijah and Elisha is here! (Transfiguration is in Luke 9:28-35.) The finite can contain the infinite! (Confer/compare later apostolic revivifications.) We do not know how long the son had been dead, though burials usually took place almost immediately on the day of death (consider Jesus’s, for example), and we do not know what the son’s soul knew or remembered, if anything, from his time wherever it went.
- V.15:** Again the Greek adjective translated “dead” is simply masculine with no indication of his age. The verb for sitting up is said to be a medical term for sitting up in bed, and the Holy Spirit did inspire the account through St. Luke a physician (Colossians 4:14). Consider the otherwise impossibility of a dead person sitting up and beginning to speak! The beginning to speak is said to be irrefutable proof that he was alive; what was said surely was not important or would have been recorded. That Jesus gives him to his mother may indicate his age/size. The Greek verb translated “give” is typical for Gospel gifts. There is no indication that the widow or the son had faith specifically in Jesus prior to the miracle, though we might imagine that the widow and son are included in the “all” that follows.
- V.16:** “All” presumably includes the disciples and great crowd that were coming with Jesus and the considerable crowd that was with the widow coming out of the town. Their fear can be both “terror” and “reverence” (as in including faith), perhaps especially insofar as they “glorified” God saying that a great prophet had risen among them and that God had visited His people. The great prophet could be that prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-22). The “risen” is the same verb as the son’s rising. And, the visitation with oversight and saving action can go back both to Luke 1:68, where the visitation is connected to redemption, and to Luke 1:78-79, in which the Sunrise from on high visits to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death and guides feet into the way of peace. (The term for bishop/pastor is related.) The two expressions cast parallel both the Great Prophet and God and them and God’s people (“His people” is the usual term for the Israelites). How much all of them believed about Jesus (for example, specifically that He was the Son of God in human flesh, the Messiah Who would die on the cross for their sins and rise from the dead) is not necessarily explicit. More relevant to us, of course, is what we believe about Him!

V.17: What goes out in the whole of Judea and the surrounding country is what the people in the crowds were saying in the preceding verse, “this Word about Him”, Who is “the Word” in John’s Prologue, for example. Now God’s Word of Holy Scripture tells us about our loved ones’ and our own not revivifications but resurrections!

- Although the Widow of Nain is not mentioned elsewhere in Holy Scripture, though the miracle seems to be in view in Luke 17:22 (in reference to John the Baptizer), we previously discussed her: in regards to the Widow of Zarephath and Elijah in 1 Kings 17:8-24 (God provides food and drink for Elijah through the widow and blessed the widow by revivifying her son through Elijah); in regards to a son of the Prophets’ Widow and the Shunamite woman and Elisha in 2 Kings 4:1-37 (God provided oil for the widow through Elisha and provided food and drink for Elisha through the Shunamite and blessed the Shunamite by promising and revivifying her son through Elisha); and in regards to Hebrews 11:35, which refers to women who “received back their dead by resurrection”. Although the context of the Hebrews verse is Old Testament people who lived by faith (11:1: the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen), perhaps also included are New Testament women: the Widow of Nain in Luke 7:11-17; Mary and Martha in John 11:1-12:19; and the widow friends of Tabitha/Dorcas in Acts 9:36-43, which latter two we will get to in their sequence (Lenski also mentions Jairus’s daughter, presumably because of the child’s mother mentioned in Mark 5:26 and Luke 8:51). Westcott calls the women’s receiving back their dead “the highest conquest of faith”; he notes their stronger instinct of natural affection; and he suggests unspecified significance to recorded raisings’ being predominantly for women.
- About what else does our consideration of the Widow of Nain raise questions or prompt discussion?
- Concluding Prayer, *LSB* 552 (stanzas 1, 7, 8, and 4), and Benediction.
- Next time (October 18?) on Dinah, who was defiled (Genesis 34:1-31)?

552 O Christ, Who Shared Our Mortal Life (stanzas 1, 7, 8, and 4)



1 O Christ, who shared our mor - tal life And
 2 The ranks of death with tro - phy grim Through
 3 The ranks of death, the Lord of Life Stood
 4 Death's pow - er holds us still in thrall And

end - ed death's long reign, Who healed the sick and
 an - cient streets once trod And sud - den - ly con -
 face to face that hour; And You took up the
 bears us toward the tomb. Death's dark - 'ning cloud hangs

raised the dead And bore our grief and pain: We
 front - ed You, The might - y Son of God. A
 age - old strife With words of awe - some pow'r. "Young
 like a pall That threat - ens earth with doom. But

know our years on earth are few, That death is
 wid - ow's tears e - voked Your Word; You stopped the
 man, a - rise!" You or - dered loud, And death de -
 You have bro - ken death's em - brace And torn a -

al - ways near. Come now to us, O
 bear - ers' tread. "Weep not!" in pit - y
 feat - ed lay. The wid - ow's son cast
 way its sting. Re - store to life our

Lord of Life; Bring hope that con - quers fear!
 then You spoke To her whose son was dead.
 off his shroud And strode from death a - way.
 mor - tal race! Raise us, O Ris - en King!

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