

## **8.00am & Online Sermon on 19 September 2021 by Rev. Bill Church**

*Gospel: Luke 7.30-37 - Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain*

A modern reader like you or me, reading this passage from Luke's gospel will immediately feel for the mother, and feel her grief, widowed and now losing her only son, and will share with the bystanders both amazement and a sense of joy and relief that the mother was able to have him back home alive, and we hope well.

Those bystanders, and the earliest readers of the Gospel would, no doubt, have felt all that but they would also have seen a lot more.

First, the widow's son was her best hope of avoiding destitution in old age. Jesus had thus saved her from the nagging anxiety of a need to end her life in poverty, begging or relying on the hospitality of strangers.

Also, the loss of her son would have meant her late husband's family line would have died out, which was sometimes seen as a mark of failure and shame.

And, above all, on the reasonable assumption that they had a better knowledge of scripture than is common today, they could not have missed the echo of Elijah raising from

apparent death the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17).

Elijah was not only revered as a great prophet himself but also as representative of all the prophets – hence at the Transfiguration, Elijah representing the prophets appeared alongside Moses representing the Law.

And Elijah was seen not to die in the usual way, but was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, as every Twickenham occasional chorister knows when he sings 'Swing low sweet chariot'.

For that reason, there was a widespread belief that Elijah would come again, either in his own right or as a forerunner of the Messiah.

The raising of the widow's son at Nain was thus not just a great act of charity to her but also a sign, a pointer to who he was.

In chapter 7 of Luke the first three episodes are – First, Jesus heals, remotely not by direct contact, the Centurion's servant, who is 'at the point of death'. Then, Jesus raises the widow's son, who is certainly dead and nearly buried. Then, messengers sent from John the Baptist arrive and ask Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another."

Jesus gives the cryptic reply: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard - the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised...."

Or, actually, not so cryptic a reply, because all of those activities are, somewhere in the Old Testament, given as what the coming Messiah will undertake.

Sometimes, parts of the gospels sound like Jesus going round doing good in a somewhat random manner. Look again and you will see these are not only miracles, 'works of power' as the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke usually describe them, but also pointers, 'signs' as John's Gospel describes them, pointing towards Jesus as 'the one who is to come', the Messiah, and much, much more.



<https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/The-Raising-of-the-Widow-s-Son-in-Nain/C743E2C89A098C75>