

A WITNESS TO THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON OF NAIN

There are two crowds in the story we have just heard.
The crowd travelling with Jesus,
And the crowd in the funeral procession.
Tonight, I want you to imagine that you were a member of that great crowd of witnesses to the miracle at Nain –
And it is the widow's son who is speaking to you now:

*As you know,
I was dead.*

*When I lay dying, I felt the cold creeping into my heart.
And fear, filled my mind.
Our scriptures say that the dead not praise the Lord.
We go down into the darkness,
We only live on in our children –
But I have no children,
And I am my mother's only son.*

*In the cold, fear and growing darkness,
All I could hear was the sound of my mother weeping –
Wailing loud,
or whimpering quietly.
First, the Lord had taken her husband,
And now me.
Her only hope for the future.
My death was her death too.*

*In the midst of life we are in death, the scriptures say.
We had found it to be true.
My father died suddenly one day.
Here today, gone tomorrow.
She took it very badly.
I was still a child.
But we scraped a living.*

*Though my Father had no brothers.
No-one to fulfil the Law and marry his widow and support her.
Some of the neighbours were kind.
They brought food to the door,
But they didn't come in.
Others didn't chase us to pay the bills we owed.
But their kindness was a rebuke,
almost as bad as the people who avoided us altogether.
There was a sense and stench of sin around us.
Surely, they said, our misfortune must have some hidden cause.
Surely it was a punishment from God?
We felt it was too,
Although we didn't know what we had done to deserve it.*

*Nazareth isn't far from Nain,
Both in the district of Galilee.
So I had heard of the strange wonder-worker from that place.
Just before I fell ill,
It was said he was in Capernaum,
And that he had healed a servant on the point of death itself,
Who was now right as rain.
Some from our town went to see this son of Joseph the carpenter,
But most of us scoffed and stayed put,
Myself included.
But that day he came with a crowd,
You were there – remember?
You told me of the press of people
as the two crowds met at the gate of the town
Was it a coincidence that he was there
just as I was being brought out for burial?*

*At that moment,
As my mortal body was being carried to the grave,
I was also travelling through a deep darkness.
I was moving towards some kind of light
Like a distant star.
It had a shape I couldn't see,
It was drawing me in.*

*The first I knew of it was a warm glow on my right side.
You told me he touched my arm –
Lord have mercy!
He touched a corpse
and defiled himself.
For me.
And the warmth in my arm,
Spread through my whole body,
And through the darkness came a sound,
His voice, loud and clear:
'Young man, I say to you, RISE!
Beckoned back by this irresistible call,
I didn't question,
Or fight,
It was a command like one from God himself.
And when I opened my eyes,
I saw that the face of Him who called me
Was surrounded by the same light I had been travelling towards
Through the darkness.*

*I sat up.
The men holding the bier cried out with alarm
and almost dropped me.
For a few moments there was dead silence.
All eyes were on me, when they should have been on him.
They were caught up in the miracle of my new life,
And they missed its source.
And then I spoke.
I asked for a drink.
Strange - I didn't praise God,
Or thank the one who gave me back my life,
Or tell my mother I loved her.
But in retrospect, what else could I have said?
I was thirsty,
What ghost or vision needs a drink!?
Only the living need water.*

*As you rushed to bring me water,
He took my hand and placed it in my mother's hands,
He gave me to her, as a midwife gives a new-born child to its mother.
She cradled me in her arms,
Tears of sorrow turned to tears of joy.
At the wonder of my life restored.*

*I had seen things that no one else had ever seen and gone on to tell.
I had entered into the deep darkness of death,
But now I knew something I never knew before -
Death is not the last word.
He had taken me by the hand and brought me back into this world,
And I knew he would do it again,
But next time, it would be the other way.
He won't call me back but forward –
Towards that distant light.
And as he gave me to my mother,
so he would give me back to my father,
and all those I have loved and lost over the years.*

*Since then, we heard he did the same to another man at Bethany called Lazarus,
Who told a similar story.
Now we know that our scriptures only told us only half the truth.
There is deep darkness in death,
But also light – and with it hope.*

*So when I heard of his painful death,
there was sorrow in my heart.
But somehow, I also knew it wasn't the end for him either.
He had told my mother not to weep,
and so I didn't weep for him.
His was a light that could never go out.
A life that could never die.
Only God himself can give life
He had given me mine.
He commanded me to rise.
And so I did.
And so did he.*