

THE FEAR OF LOSING A LOVED ONE
LUKE 7:11-17
SERMON

Fran Zok of Buffalo, New York tells the story of one day as she cleaned her house she started singing a gospel song Andrea Crouch wrote many years ago, “Soon and very soon, we’re going to see the King”. Her young son, Cory who was playing in his room next door, began singing with her. But something wasn’t quite right. Fran listened to Cory’s version of the song, which went like this, “soon and very soon, we’re going to Burger King!”

Andrea Crouch’s song reminds us of the blessed hope we have after we die. I want to speak this morning about the fear of losing a loved one. In my own life this has been one of my most nagging and persistent fears. I’m sure that losing a child or a spouse must be one of the most difficult and painful experiences in life.

Sally and I came very close to losing one of our children. Two weeks after Sally gave birth to Christy, Sally took Christy to see the Pediatrician. In the doctor’s office Christy stopped breathing but then started again, rather abruptly. The doctor told her she could either take her home or take her to the hospital. Sally took her to the hospital and it was a good thing she did because Christy stopped breathing again. This time she stopped for a long time. A Pediatric cardiologist intubated her and put her on a respirator. Christy suffered from a severe Respiratory Syncytial Viral infection. She spent the next six days in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care unit of the hospital. Sally and I cried and prayed and asked God to spare her life. People in our church in Sacramento prayed fervently. We named Christy “Christina Grace” and God showed us his great grace in sparing her life!

How do we overcome the fear of losing a loved one? We **invite Jesus’ presence into the very midst of our fear.** Jesus didn’t evade or shirk situations dealing with death. Rather, he willingly entered the situations dealing with death of loved ones. As Jesus participated in the situations, the homes and experiences of those dealing with death, Jesus ministered to the people in the very midst of their fear.

In our text this morning in **Luke 7** Jesus observed a funeral procession in the town of Nain. Jesus quickly evaluated the situation, calmed the widow’s fears of losing her only son and used his divine power to restore the man to life. Clearly, Jesus’ presence and actions calmed the women’s fears!

In **Mark 5:22--24** we read of a synagogue ruler by the name of Jairus. **“Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus came there. Seeing Jesus he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live. So Jesus went with him”**. By the time Jesus arrived to heal the girl, she had died. But this didn’t stop Jesus! He took her by the hand and commanded her to rise from death, which she did.

Sometime later when Jesus received the news that his friend Lazarus was sick, Jesus didn’t go to Lazarus and his family initially. Jesus knew Lazarus would die but that he would raise him from the dead. So, Jesus waited two days before setting out for Bethany, where Lazarus lived. Eventually, Jesus made his way to Bethany where he ministered to the sisters of Lazarus. Jesus comforted the women in the very midst of their fear of losing their brother; he ministered to them in their fear and then raised Lazarus from death.

As we consider *our* fear of losing a loved one, whether it's a child, parent, spouse, good friend, we **should invite Jesus' into the very midst of our fear**. Ask Jesus to enter this tender area of your life. When we do this, our fear of losing a loved one will subside. The very *presence* of Jesus in this tender area of our heart will calm our fear! Our trust in the Lord for our loved one will grow. We will not be disturbed or troubled by fear!! Jesus' presence will calm our fear! As we invite his presence into our fear, we also:

1. Give up control of our loved ones to Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus observed a funeral procession in the town of Nain. Nain was located six miles south of Nazareth, relatively close to Jesus' hometown. Burials took place outside of town. Luke informs us that the man who had died happened to be the only son of a widow. The death of a widow's only son in ancient Israel was what one scholar called, "the greatest misfortune conceivable". Why? Because the only son of a widow represented her sole means of financial support. How would this widow support herself if she lost her only son? In ancient Israel, women didn't work outside of the home, Social Security didn't exist, so this widow would probably end up begging, unless another family member or friend took pity on her and helped her.

Jesus observed her desperate situation and had pity on her. Look in **Luke 7:13**, **"When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry!"** In the original text, the phrase, "his heart went out to her" is only one word. The *root* of this word means "inwards or guts". The ancient Jews believed the gut was the source of feeling and compassion. Note how the English translators translated it "his heart went out to her" They did this because in our culture, the heart is the source of compassion. The word Luke uses in the original means, "to be moved with compassion, to pity". Jesus felt deep compassion for the woman!

I imagine the woman felt a deep, searing pain. She had lost her husband and now, she had lost her only son. But she didn't have control of her son. She didn't get to make the decision regarding his life. Only God could make that decision.

Many of us struggle with control. We want control over our circumstances, our dreams and plans, our children and marriages. We're what psychologists call, "control freaks". Do you try to control everything and everyone?

I love the story Doris Sanford tells of the woman who worked in a high-rise office building in London. Every day for her coffee break she went down to the first floor cafeteria, purchased a Kit Kat candy bar and a cup of coffee. One day she bought her coffee and candy bar. She sat down at the table she always did and started looking for something in her purse. When she looked up from her purse a man had seated himself in the chair directly across from her seat. He had a cup of coffee, a doughnut and a Kit Kat candy bar in his mouth. He didn't apologize or offer any explanation. He simply ate it. But the woman was very irritated. At first, she said nothing but finally became very angry. Before leaving she reached over and grabbed the remnant of his doughnut which he had been eating and screamed at the man, "There now. How does that feel!" She then marched back to her office, with her blood pressure greatly elevated. To her horror, she opened her purse and there on top was *her* Kit Kat candy bar!!

When we try to control everything and everyone, we can make embarrassing mistakes! Inviting Jesus into the very midst of our fear means can do something else:

2. Grant Jesus a prominent place in dealing with our fear.

Luke provides minimal information about the woman who lost her son. Luke doesn't tell us her name, her place in the community, when her husband died or many other facts. Luke also tells us very little about the man who died. He doesn't tell us his name, age, what caused his death, what he did for a living, etc. As I worked on this message, I went through the story and counted the number of times Luke mentions Jesus' name or a pronoun referring to him. Luke mentions Jesus' name or a pronoun referring to him more than the widow or the man *combined*. Why? Why does Luke give Jesus such a prominent place in the account? ***He wants us to focus our attention on Jesus.***

Jesus acted with compassion. Jesus raised the man from death to life. Jesus gave the man back to his mother. Clearly, Jesus plays a prominent role in this miracle! Further, the account teaches that we too should give Jesus a prominent place in dealing with our fears of losing loved ones. Invite Jesus into the very midst of your fear!

I love the rather humorous account in the book of Acts when an angel of the Lord freed Peter from prison Turn in your Bible to **Acts 12:11-16:**

Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating." When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter's at the door!" "You're out of your mind" they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel". But Peter kept on knocking and when they opened the door and saw him they were astonished.

These early believers were afraid that Peter might lose his life so they prayed fervently for his release from prison. They asked Jesus to save his life. When it happened, when an angel of the Lord broke Peter's chains and led him out of prison to the house where his friends had gathered, the early Christians couldn't believe it! Don't you love the part of the story where the servant girl just left Peter at the door instead of inviting him into the room? I imagine Peter stood at the door shouting for her to come back and open it!

As we struggle with our fear of losing loved ones, we too need to focus on Jesus. Give him a prominent place in dealing with your fear! Here's an idea that might: remember that our loved ones were *God's* loved ones before they were *our* loved ones. Max Lucado makes this point in his book, **Fearless**. Listen: **"After all, our kids were his kids first. Before they were ours, they were his. Even as they are ours, they are still his. We tend to forget this fact, regarding our children as "our" children as though we have the final say in their health and welfare. We don't.** (Lucado, Max, **Fearless**, Thomas Nelson, 2009, pg.58) Since we don't have control over our loved ones and they belong to God, we should grant Jesus a prominent place in our fear over losing them. Finally, as we invite Jesus into the midst of our fear we should:

3. Celebrate Jesus' power over death!

Let's return to our text in **Luke 7:14-15:** **"Then he went up and touched the coffin and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"**

The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us” they said. “God has come to help his people.”

Jesus raised this young man to life. Jesus also raised Jairus' daughter and Lazarus. Isn't it interesting that Jesus raised three people to life in the New Testament? The number three has great significance in the Bible. First, the Bible teaches that God exists in three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. Jesus lived among us for three years. Jesus fulfilled three offices: Prophet, Priest and King. When crucified, the very last words from Jesus' mouth, were three words, "It is finished". Jesus remained dead for three days but resurrected on the third day. So, the number three indicates divine perfection as well as something that's real, substantial, entire and complete.

In raising three people from death to life, we observe that Jesus' power to raise someone from death to life didn't exist as an anomaly, or something out of the ordinary. New Testament writers record three miracles of people being raised from death to life to show us that Jesus had power over death and he used it not only to restore life but also to calm the fears of the loved ones who had died.

Recently, many Christian radio stations have been playing Matthew West's song, "Save A Place for Me". On his website, Matthew West shares the story behind this song:

She couldn't speak. Not anymore. The stroke she suffered took that away. She couldn't walk either. Her 86 years of life had left her paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair. She was my grandmother, Luella Jane West. Several years ago, the doctors told the family she wasn't going to make it. I remember getting the phone call from my dad. I remember the trip to Iowa, the hospital room, saying goodbye. My family cried, laughed and cried some more in the waiting room of the hospital as we remembered and celebrated her life. And truly it was a life worth celebrating! Grandma was a mother of 10 children who loved God with all her heart and believed in the power of prayer. I will always remember cards and letters she would send me. They were filled with encouraging words and scripture to live by. I will not forget her example of how to live a life that really says something. And though she couldn't speak during her last years on earth, we shared some amazing times together. Today, there is another Luella Jane West here with us. She is my daughter. And you should have seen Grandma's face light up when she met her namesake and great-granddaughter for the first time! Someday when Lulu asks about her name, I will be proud to tell her about a life that had something to say. On New Year's Day, 2009 grandma left this world. I sang "Save a Place for Me" at her funeral. The lines that resonated the most with me when I thought of grandma were "I wanna live my life just like you did/Make the most of my time like you did/I wanna make my home up in the sky just like you did". I read a recent interview with Billy Graham that summed up the heart behind this song. When asked about the passing of his wife, Ruth, Rev. Graham humbly replied, "I know God has prepared a home for her in heaven. I just hope she saves a room for me".

As they reflect on the death of important loved ones in their lives, both Matthew West and Billy Graham celebrate Jesus' power over death.

Are you struggling with the fear of losing a loved one today? I challenge you to invite Jesus into the midst of your fear. His presence will help you surrender control, give Jesus a prominent place and celebrate his power over death. Let us pray.

