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

Like a number of sermons in this series on marriage, today’s message applies to many of us, married or not.

Fran Zok of Buffalo, New York tells the story of how 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 Christian believers 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 our daughter Christy, Sally took Christy to see the Pediatrician. Christy had been suffering from some kind of infection that made it difficult for her to breathe. In the doctor’s office Christy stopped breathing completely but then started again, rather abruptly. The doctor told Sally that 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 Syncticial 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 great grace in sparing her life!

How do we overcome the fear of losing a loved one? We invite Jesus into our fear. Jesus didn’t evade or shirk situations dealing with death. Rather, he willingly entered the situations dealing with the death of loved ones. Jesus had great compassion for those dealing with death! As Jesus participated in the situations, the homes and experiences of those dealing with death, Jesus ministered to people in the very midst of their fear. Jesus can still do that for us today! Perhaps you’ve had to deal with the death of a loved one recently. The situation has left you feeling fearful and insecure. Ask Jesus to enter into your fears and insecurities. He can minister as powerfully to you as He did to people in the New Testament!

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 calmed the women’s fears!

As we consider our fear of losing a loved one, whether it’s a child, spouse, or good friend, we can invite Jesus right into our fear. The very presence of Jesus in the tender area of our heart can calm our fear! As we experience the very presence of Jesus by his Holy Spirit, our trust in the Lord for our loved one will grow. We will not be disturbed or troubled by fear! It will not overcome us! Jesus’ presence can calm our fears! As we invite Jesus’ presence into our fear, we can:

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. We can see it on the map on the screen.

   Burials took place outside of town in first century Israel. Luke informed 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 and 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 translated it this way 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 deeply 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 and his life. She hadn’t had control over her husband and his fate either. She didn’t get to make the decision regarding his life. Only God could make that decision.

   Many of us struggle with control don’t we? We seek control over our loved ones, our circumstances, and our dreams and plans. The problem is, we can’t control any of these things!

2. **Grant Jesus a prominent place in dealing with our fear.**
   Luke provided minimal information about the woman who lost her son. He doesn’t tell us her name, her place in the community, when her husband died or many other facts. Luke also told 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 mentioned Jesus’ name or a pronoun referring to him. Luke mentioned Jesus’ name or a pronoun referring to him more than the widow or the man combined. Why? He wanted us to focus our attention on Jesus.

Jesus acted with great compassion. Jesus raised the man from death to life. Jesus gave the man back to his mother. Clearly, Jesus played a prominent role in this miracle! The account teaches us 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! Ask him to enter your fears and overcome them!

I love the rather humorous account in the book of Acts when an angel of the Lord freed Peter from prison in Jerusalem. The angel led Peter out of 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 in prison so they prayed fervently for his release. In their prayers, they asked Jesus to save his life. When Peter was released from prison and went 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 standing at the door without opening it? I imagine Peter stood at the door and kept knocking hoping desperately that someone would open it! Can’t you hear Peter screaming, “Hey, could you please open the door? It’s me, Peter!!”

For those of us who struggle with the fear of losing a loved one, I invite you to give Jesus a prominent place in dealing with your fear! Here’s an idea that’s worth remembering: remember that your loved ones were God’s loved ones before they were your loved ones. Since we don’t have control over our loved ones and they belong to God and not us, we can grant Jesus a prominent place in our fear over losing them. Finally, we should:

3. Celebrate Jesus’ power over death!
Let’s return to our text in Luke 7:14-15 where we read this about Jesus: “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 used his divine power to raise this young man to life! Can you imagine watching this miracle? Watching a dead man return to life? Jesus also raised Jairus’ daughter as recorded in Mark 5 and his friend, Lazarus from death as recorded in John 11. Jesus demonstrated his power over death! In raising 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. It happened at least three times!

After Billy Graham’s wife, Ruth died, Billy Graham said this about her passing: 'Ruth was my life partner, and we were called by God as a team. No one else could have borne the load that she carried. She was a vital and integral part of our ministry, and my work through the years would have been impossible without her encouragement and support. I will miss her terribly, and look forward even more to the day I can join her in Heaven.”

Billy Graham acknowledged Ruth’s love and support and how much he looks forward to seeing her in heaven.

Do you struggle with the fear of losing a loved one? Invite Jesus into the very midst of your fear! His presence, the presence of the Lord will help you give up control, give Jesus a prominent place in your life and celebrate His power over death.

This past week I interviewed Gene and Glenda Cossette about the death of their son, Brian. Brian committed suicide thirty years ago and I wanted to ask Gene and Glenda about how they have managed since his death:

1) Gene and Glenda, Can you tell us briefly about the circumstances of Brian’s death?
2) What role (if any) did fear play for you in Brian’s death and the loss of him?
3) What has the Lord taught you from his death?
4) What counsel can you offer to parents who fear the death of their children and or spouse?

After I interviewed Gene and Glenda this past week, Glenda commented, “boy, what a depressing subject!” I said, well, we’re talking about a difficult subject. This isn’t Saturday Night Live! As Christians, it’s very easy to come on Sunday morning with smiles on our faces that can easily hide the hurt and fear in our hearts. So, I commended Gene and Glenda. I said“ you two shared so much that’s helpful to others: you shared the fear that you had of Brian’s death driving your marriage apart, you shared how we can’t control our loved ones, you shared how your Christian friends came alongside you and simply provided a ministry of presence. You’ve given us some helpful tools through your witness.” We can take these tools and use them today or use them in the future.

Next week will be my last sermon in this series on marriage. I’ve titled it, “Make your Marriage Last a Lifetime.” Let us pray.