

**Open My Eyes, That I May See**

**Luke 7:11**

*“Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain.”*

A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Eric Jackson in Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church, Rensselaerville, NY  
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Transportation happens through a variety of means. In my native New York City, I would travel via subway. The Subway would take you anywhere twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week, and three hundred and sixty five days per year.

When I arrived to New Hampshire, there were no Subway trains or an Amtrak Train Station whatsoever. In New Hampshire the main mode of transportation is driving. Every once in awhile I would drive somewhere and would bump into a symbol of New Hampshire's abandoned past. I would see railroad tracks. As I was driving around one day, there it was a boxcar!

Boxcars are not made for us to ride in. It's completely barren on the inside. This is why it's called a boxcar. Boxcars could carry large freight loads and shipments. This could be anything from livestock like cows to huge generators. What makes a Boxcar unique is that while one New York City Subway car can be driven down the tracks, the boxcar cannot. However, if there's a train with an engine that's connected to a boxcar then the boxcar can go wherever it can down the tracks.

Luke shares an occasion with us where the disciples connect with Jesus and are taken on a journey to a place called Nain. Whether you are a Bible scholar, theologian, or just a seeker, if you look in the encyclopedia, Harper-Collins Study Bible or the GSB (Google Study Bible) the only item you'll discover of great historical experience is Jesus visiting Nain.

As you may know, Nain was a small-town that was about ten miles south of Nazareth. There weren't any significant historical sites here. It really didn't connect to the large city centers. We don't even know of any special purpose for Jesus being there. But, Jesus still chooses to go to Nain. To a place that's out of the way, to uncharted territory, to parts unknown, Jesus chooses to go to Nain. It's one thing to read about, hear about, think about, offer a vote-of-confidence, or have concern for Nain. It's another to actually go and be present. There's something radically different about being present to listen, see, experience, touch, feel, and hear about the stories of life in a place called Nain. To hear the heartbeat of the community, listen to the cries, and share in its mutual hope. There is a radical difference when you are there with someone.

Many of us here today are

passionate about a greater reality beyond ourselves,

passionate about making a difference in the world

passionate about a living faith that calls us to impact the world in the here and now.

I believe this is why we find Jesus and the disciples in Nain.

In fact, it isn't long before Jesus and the disciples are there before they are caught in the throes of a funeral procession. The proverbial hearse is coming by. Jesus encounters a widow whose son has just died. Being a widow today was much different being a widow back then.

During those times, widows were not permitted to own property. When the spouse died, they would rely on the son to claim the inheritance so they will have the resources to live. But, there's a problem! Luke tells us that this is her only son. If there is no son to inherit the property, the widowed woman who didn't have a male son to inherit the property was left homeless and in abject poverty. Let's not forget that Jesus was in the midst of a funeral procession. See, in traditional Jewish custom the dead were usually buried within 24-hours. So, she is in the storm of the pain that comes with the raw grief of her son just passing away, and now she in abject poverty. Death has radically transformed the life of a woman in Nain.

Jesus could have waited quietly for the procession to pass.

Jesus could have offered a nod

Jesus could have offered a word of apology.

But, what does Jesus do?

Jesus reaches his hand out, puts it on the proverbial hearse and disrupts the funeral procession. Now, when Jesus touches it, he is coming in contact with the dead. During those times, it would make one ritually impure if they came in contact with the dead. This means that you have to be considered 'cleansed' by the priest, before you were welcomed back into the community. Jesus lets go his pride, community standing, and reputation to make a difference in the life of this widow.

Jesus reaches out his hand, touches the bier (ancient hearse that's carried by pallbearers) and says to him "young man, I say to you rise." He gets up and lives again. What looks like

a clear path to the grave was stopped. A situation that looked dead now had life. They were all witnesses to resurrection.

If we are going to make a difference in the lives of others, in the lives of the community, and in the lives of those in the world, with authenticity, then every once in awhile, we have to go to a place called Nain. The Nain of our proximity doesn't necessarily represent a geographical location as it does a condition. The condition of those who are in a place to be forgotten about and marginalized. Far removed from our present day reality.

Where injustice prevails

Where those in power can freely act on invitations to exert excessive violence on marginalized communities.

Where people are forgotten about while profit is remembered.

Where human suffering is allowed to perpetuate

Where individuals can easily be forgotten about.

If we are going to be change agents

As a teenager, I remember coming home one day and seeing a battery powered Mini-TV in the kitchen. I didn't think much of it because the pictures were too small. So I went back in my bedroom and looked at my regular sized television where I could be comfortable and watch my favorite show from a distance multi-tasking. I was okay with not getting near that mini-TV. Now, I grew up in a place called Co-op City in the Bronx. In Co-Op City they had their own electricity plant. But, almost every summer in August when it almost 90 degrees there would be a power outage. One day, it happened.

So on a hot summer day, in these 33 story buildings, there was no elevator, no light, no electricity, and no TV until the next morning. So I needed something to do. But, then there was the mini-TV and I was never so happy to see that battery powered Mini-TV. I couldn't see the pictures from afar so I leaned in and got up close and personal. It was then that I was able to see the big picture. It was when I was up close and personal.

Right now, we live in a time where death dealing institutions, death dealing systems, and death dealing ideas are trying to get up close and personal. We have people in the forgotten parts of the human community both near and far, who are caught in the crossfires of life and death.

We truly can be agents of change, agents of transformation, and agents of justice when we connect and hear the stories of the suffering. To do otherwise is like boxing in the dark, you don't know where to move.

Jesus and the disciples were only able to help the widow's son rise when they were present and saw her need. This is how their eyes were opened that they might see.

So may we be intentional about opening our eyes that we might see, connect and listen to the stories of the world, hearing the beat of its heart, so we can discover a shared mutual hope that's organized to overcome death and resist Empire just like Jesus did.

Amen.