

June 6, 2010 – Rev. Joseph Taban Lasuba [PDF] (1 Kings 17:17-24; Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17)

In December 1997, I graduated from seminary in Beirut and decided to take a retreat for one week in the mountains of Lebanon, spending time to pray as I prepared to return back home. The country was still going through war. As I was driving down after spending time before God, it was a Sunday morning around eight in the morning, the streets are empty and Lebanon is a country of mountains. Suddenly as I was driving down, something happened with the car. I heard a noise and the car lost control. I used the brakes, the brakes are not working. And the car turned to the right and sloping down into the valley and it's about 500 meters down to the right, but also at the other side is about 500 meters into the valley. I could not have enough time to pray a lot of long prayers. But I only say one word, Jesu, Jesus, in my language, and the car turned back to the road. But the car turned back to the road just on that time, a few seconds, the car collided and crashed into another car. And in that car I realized it was Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Hezbollah in Lebanon. The guards jump out with their handguns. They suspect maybe this is somebody who is trying to kill their leader and quickly I say it in Arabic language that I know very well and they knew I am a Sudanese from my accent. And you know they adore Sudanese because they are also terrorists like them. And they put down their guns. And to cut the story short, as minutes go by my eyes are getting dimmer. It was only in the evening I realized I was in the hospital. But I was just finishing seminary to try to return home. It was a collision between a young man from Sudan and a leader of a party whose work is to fight and destroy. It was a collision.

My dear friends, we are all familiar with traffic accidents where we see two cars or two automobiles run into each other or sometimes one runs into the other, maybe it is accidentally or sometimes because of careless driving. And such collisions can be dangerous and people from both sides can experience casualties, loss of property and human life. Well, today in the Gospel reading, Luke tells us about a collision that has taken place at the gate of the city town called Nain. It was not a collision between trains or automobiles, but between two groups that collided at that gate of the city called Nain. It was a procession of death and sorrow that was coming from the town of Nain and collided, met with another procession led by the son of the living God who is also the Truth, the Way and Life, Jesus. And as the two groups collided, they form a new group. A group of joy, of hope, of celebration. And the man who was there who was supposed to be taken out of his city to be buried was brought back to become a sign of joy to the family, to his nation, to his city.

In the front of the procession that is coming from this town of Nain was a dead man, a dead man being carried into a place of burial. But in front of the other one is Jesus, prince of life. But I thank God that the collision of these two groups formed a new group, united to bring hope back to Nain. Well, as the events of Luke tells us that the disciples of Jesus, now it happened the day after that he went into the city called Cana and many of his disciples went with him. His disciples were there. The church accompanied Jesus into the city gate of Nain where dead and suffering and hopelessness were experienced. The church is being taken by Jesus, brought to Jesus.

What I want to share with you this morning and to experience brought them into three positions so that they can experience the life, the teaching, the mission of Jesus. It brought them with Him. I do believe that Jesus brought the disciples, but still He also wanted to bring his church today to those places, the Nains of our world, to the gate cities, that what comes out of it is deadness and hopelessness. He wants to take his church to those gates so that they experience and learn what is Jesus doing. Three situations where they were put to place where they can learn.

My first point is that Jesus brought the disciples, he brought the church into a place of death. He went with his church to Nain, a Galilean town. And Nain in Hebrew meaning green pastures or lovely place or place of beauty. Yes, it's a beautiful town, but it's been described by death. When the young man of the town dies, that means the future is dim. Luke indicated that the disciples went with Him, as I said, and a large crowd. Luke told us that there was a crowd, but there were disciples. I thank God that he meant the difference between the two. There were crowds following Jesus, they know why with their own personal desires or goals, but the disciples were there following Jesus into Nain. We know that the disciples were there not doing any – they were not active, but they were there to be with Jesus as he collides -- face the situation of the town of Nain and I thank God it was right at the gate of that town. To stop the funeral, not to continue and turn the funeral back into the city, bringing hope.

A dead man and he's being carried. A dead man cannot resist, he can be carried because he's dead. And I know growing up as a young man, I know it's easy when you are morally or ethically dead, it's very easy that you can be taken to places because you cannot resist. He's being taken and carried into burial. Is it not true sometimes with us when we – our conscience become dead and our hearts are cold and we can be carried into our own burials without us even realizing we are moving towards death. A young man cannot resist death. A dead fish is carried by the current, but the living fish can swim against the current because it's alive.

The disciples were not playing here an active role, as I say, but they were simply there with Jesus and it's a role that later was identified as one of the conditions of discipleship and the apostolic office. As we see in Acts, Chapter 1:21 and when the disciples were choosing a replacement for Judas, the Bible say – they say together let us choose a man who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. Accompanied us with Jesus. Went with Jesus to those places. The companionship of the disciples of Jesus allowed them to be shaped by the teaching, by the life, by the mission of Jesus. It was an invitation for them to come and see what the Lord is doing so that they themselves in their turn can get involved in that mission as they go make a difference right at the city gates of our Nains of our world today.

Getting out of our comfort zones and going with Jesus to visit puts us in a place where we become through witnesses as the disciples put it, they say that someone who has been with us as Jesus went out and come in become true witnesses. What is a witness? A witness is a piece of evidence. It's not just telling a story that he heard, but it's a "I was there. I know it. I've experienced it. I have seen it."

Some of my experiences sometimes coming to the west is going into those buildings where there are no windows where you cannot see outside. There are places that are nice places to the extent that you don't see outside and it feels like this is the whole world here. And you get so

comfortable there because you don't see. As an African, I like this church because I can even see the street. I can see the world outside physically. It's not just the spiritual, physically. So that we see beyond ourselves. And this is what Jesus was inviting the church, inviting the disciples to go with him to Nain while Jesus brought them to see death, what death is doing to that town.

Number two, Jesus brought the disciples, brought the church into a place of desperation in verse 12. Yes, it's a beautiful city, but this city is being robbed of its young man, the future, the hope. In seeing this situation, I see my country. I see myself, a country that has lost the majority of its brain, the majority of the energy of the young men through the war. In the first war, half a million died. In the second war, between '55 and '72, 500,000 died and between the second war, 1983 to 2005, another two million died. In 2003, over 400 to 500 in Darfur died. And as I speak, the death is still going on. The young people who were supposed to give hope are dying. Would it not move Jesus to move to that gate city of such a place called Nain so that he will turn the young man back alive so that he will not be buried so that he carries on and becomes hope for his mother for his widow.

Many times I have seen like my country being a widow, being robbed. Husband, the man, the young boys. Either they're in Australia or America or elsewhere or in their graves. Jesus brought them to come and see this desperate situation. Dead man being carried is the only son of his mother who is a widow. Luke sent us this story around the widow. She has already been suffering, losing her husband. And what is left for her that reminds her of the memory of her husband? Their only son, but now he's also dead. The woman is left desperate in a condition she has nothing to look forward to but poverty and desperate situation. The future is dim. She's left at the mercy of others and their kindness which I know can be humiliating. I've seen people cueing up to eat food that is provided through relief. All the people. And in our culture it's a humiliation to line up to eat. Of course, we don't go for food in cues. We sit in circles. Humility. But because you want to be alive, you will allow yourself to be humiliated and that's the place where the widow finds herself. She's trapped in a helpless condition. And I thank God that the disciples were there to learn, to see, to be with Jesus. Jesus took them, brought them to a place of death so that they will experience – get out and so that they could see beyond themselves. Took them to a place of desperation so that they can see the suffering of others. That situation is that Jesus brought them into a place and time of deliverance so that they see what hope Jesus is bringing. They were brought to a place where they can learn about radical love.

My friends, if Jesus would choose between walking on water to show his power and bringing joy back to a widow, what do you think Jesus would choose? And he chose to go to Nain. Not just to raise the man from the dead, but his worry about the widow who has lost everything. And he restored the man back to life to restore the joy and hope not only for the widow, but to represent the reality.

A number of lessons can be learned here. Jesus is not only moved by his desire to show his power, but he was moved by compassion. Luke said he had compassion. He put himself in the place of them. They saw his heart. He depends on the young man. And Jesus said the first words that came from his mouth, "Do not weep. You have wept so long. Do not weep." And

the disciples are there hearing, seeing what Jesus is doing. "Do not weep." He wants to restore back the joy back to this widow. Luke was aiming to disclose the character of Christ and his mission and the nature of God's redemptive intervention. And it can be seen in these words. In verse 11 we see that Jesus came, he went physically, embodiment. Physically he moved, incarnation, he went there to the city gate. Jesus saw, in verse 13, he saw and see. And the Lord saw how he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Jesus see. Many times when we speak of hope that you have eyes that you can see with, ears to hear with. Many times we see, but we don't see. Jesus saw, saw her heart, her need. Gives me hope that Jesus sees the situations of the Nains and cities of this world. So Jesus touched, he touched the coffin. He touched and he broke a lot of traditions. How can you touch a dead man? According to tradition, you cannot touch a dead man. But Jesus touched the coffin. And the Bible said when he touched, those who were carrying the man stopped. Jesus came, Jesus saw, Jesus touched, Jesus spoke, "Do not weep."

The other week I was in Atlanta coming down, the bus broke down and everybody was angry in the bus. Everybody was cursing the driver, everybody was throwing any load they can throw. And I was there quiet in my seat reading my book and I was worried why I was not worried. Somebody sitting next to me said, "You don't know what's happening?" He thought maybe I'm deaf or something. I say, "Yes, I know. The bus broke down." He said, "Where are you from?" And I say, "My friend, this bus is going to break anyway. If it is not now, later. And they will surely bring another bus. Not only the bus, this world we're living in one day is going to end. Let us enjoy the moment. We have extra time to pray." But my worry was the driver. I went to him, put my hand around him. I don't know his name. But I say, "Man, being thrown all kinds of words," so I went and put my hand behind him on his back and I said, "You did not break the car. This thing is going to break anyway." And he looked at me and said, "Where are you from? You speak a different language." Am I speaking in tongues or something? Where are you from? Speaking hope rather than cursing. Do not weep. Jesus came, so touched, Jesus spoke, Jesus turned a dead man after being resurrected back to his mother.

I want to thank God for those who have decided to get out of their comfort zone and journey with Jesus into those places where there's hopelessness, where there's a lot of despair, death. I want to thank the friends of Sudan for accompanying Jesus in the journey in the gates of my country during the war, for those who give their life, give their prayers, give their time, but they were there with Jesus. I want to thank God for St. Luke's because we have joined Jesus. I have a lot of hope for my country and I know a lot of things are happening at the gates of my country. And thank you St. Luke's for being there around Jesus. Thank you for getting out of your comfort zone and giving time and energy and resources. I think today as I – this is my last Sunday, I can say to St. Luke's that this man, the only son to a widow called Sudan who has lost so many, brought to America and being injected into him life through the gift of education, friendship and I will say to Anne and to the friends of Sudan, you can turn him back to his mother, to Sudan and say, "Here's your son." God bless you.