

May 27, 2018    The Town of Nain    Luke 7:11-17

So.....what do you know about the city of Nain? I must tell you that prior to our first trip to Israel in 2015, my answer would have been...not a thing! In the attempt to get a grasp on the geography of Israel, I divide the country into 4 segments south to north. And these are really rough divisions into regions. I call the first region the South. The second I call Jerusalem and its surroundings. The 3<sup>rd</sup> is Samaria. The 4<sup>th</sup> and most northerly is Galilee. Nain is in Galilee. And I want you to understand that a BA in English and history teaches you nothing about this. And a Masters in Divinity does not teach you much more. A Doctorate level degree taught me that I could read and as strange as this will sound, I had little interest in reading about the geography of Israel. Nain is in the northern quarter of the nation of Israel.

Galilee is dominated by the presence of water. There is only one fresh water stream in the whole of Israel. The Jordan River, very comparable to Rawdon Creek flows north to south to the Sea of Galilee. There are villages all along the Jordan because one of the things you must have to have a community of any size is water. Pay attention to this! The Sea of Galilee is about half the size of Moira Lake in Madoc. Moira is an hour glass lake. Pick which ever half you like. Because it is the only fresh water lake in Israel it is surrounded by cities that have grown from villages.

Around the Sea of Galilee are Cana, Capernaum, Zippora, Tiberius, and I could not find Nain on a modern map of Israel which probably means it has been absorbed by one of the other cities. But it is possible I just do not have detailed enough resources. John Calvin makes this comment about the naming of the city...it is a detail which contributes to the certainty of the history. Take a moment to take in what the Reformer is saying. He is reminding us that Luke is extremely careful about details like time and place. Luke tells us in the opening verses of his Gospel he did his homework in order to produce a trustworthy account. Like Mike Holmes, Luke did it once, actually twice if you count Acts, and both times he did it right, adhering to standards the world had not yet begun to recognize as necessary to writing accurate history. Calvin, recognized the significance of that principle. Calvin also mentions that St Jerome testified that Nain was still in existence in his time.

Jesus, the twelve, a considerable crowd of followers, (the 120 is starting to gel) are walking from Capernaum and they come to Nain. As they approached the gate of the city. Nain had walls around it. It was like most communities of any size in the time of Jesus a gaited community. You know what that means. Security. They have water because of the proximity to Galilee and the Jordan. As they approached the gate of the city, they meet a funeral procession. Luke learns, and Jesus quickly learned, the man who was dead was the son of a woman in the procession and he was her only son.

Jesus said HE was going to die to save HIS people. It is impossible to believe HE was unaware of the implications of HIS death for HIS mother Mary who is part of this crowd of followers. Where Jesus goes. Mary his mother goes. She supports and cares for HIM. HIS standing is the reason she has stature, and therefore food and shelter. You shelter Jesus, you shelter HIS mother. And Jesus is aware that in HIS world, for a woman to be widowed, and lose her eldest or only son, means her life is threatened because of the poverty that will follow. She cannot own anything of significance. The Scripture says that when “HE saw her (the mother of this dead son) HIS heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” It is a touching and an emotional scene. “If you only knew how much HE loves you.” HE knows her loss. “Don’t cry.” It’s one of the first things we say to those we love when they do cry. And Jesus is not just saying the words for something to say in a hard moment. Hard for her. Hard for HIM.

“Jesus went up” Luke tells us, “And touched the coffin.” Extraordinary! There is a dead body in the coffin. Rabbis do not do this. It makes them ceremonially unclean. The Pharisees are going to hear about this and they will be all the more convinced Jesus is big time trouble, and a sinful man. In doing so, Jesus has also stopped the funeral procession. It is interesting. The crowd has probably just tripled in size. There is the crowd following Jesus. There is the crowd that is party to this funeral. And then there is all the traffic going two ways at this bottleneck of a city gate. The mix of believers, non-

believers when it comes to Jesus, and those who simply have other priorities...getting home, getting down the road. Jesus has just put the cork in the neck of the bottle. Everything is at a stand still.

Then Jesus says to the corpse, “Young man I say to you, get up!” And the dead man sits up and starts talking. There are gasps of wonder. There are shouts of joy. For the passer by this is the greatest show on earth. Do you see what I see?! And it doesn’t end. The coffin is lowered to the ground and Jesus gives the young man back to his mother. Suddenly you have a major religious development. People are amazed. In awe. People are praising God. People are talking about the appearance of a great prophet! People are saying God has come to help HIS people! And we are told the news spread about Jesus. News spread about Jesus south to Judea, and of course in the surrounding Galilee region.

And it is easy for us to be skeptical. “Couldn’t be. Could it?” And that is the whole issue isn’t it. Jesus is not just a man. For Luke as a witness, for this one crowd at the gates of the city of Nain, and suddenly it has become one, crowd. They are talking about God being right there at the Nain gate. They are talking about Jesus being a prophet of the living God who created Israel and raised up David the King, and, and ... the reality of the miraculous. The raising of the dead! The Son of Man. The Messiah of God. I mean if you thought it was spectacular that Jesus healed the blind, or the deaf, or the

lepers, or forgave sins... And you need to remember Jesus did not just do this once. HE raised Lazarus. He raised the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41). And of course HE is Jesus who would be crucified, dead and buried and then raised up on the third day! Luke is telling us it is a package. All of it. And it amounts to who Jesus is. "If you only knew, how much God loves you!"

See, Luke is begging us to listen to the people who were travelling with Jesus, who were part of the funeral procession, who got stuck in the traffic jamb at the gate to the city of Nain. What Luke tells us is there was no road rage. People saw what happened. I like my daughter's phrase. It is the God moment. Suddenly everyone is talking about the fact that it is no secret what God can do. And they are placing Jesus in the heart of the circle of the love of God, the grace of God that saves and cleanses and redeems. People were made glad in God for what they saw and the fact of their being there to see it. A dead man is alive. A mother and her son are restored. And they are telling neighbours and friends what they saw and that it was without question that Jesus is God's saving instrument. And Luke is right. If you were there and saw what happened.... It produces a crisis. You either believe, or you do not. And that is what this is all about. As Indiana Jones said to the two FBI officers in the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark, "It's the power of God...any of you guys ever go to Sunday School?"

Let us pray;

The gate of the city of Nain. A body in a coffin. The weeping of grief. And then restoration, life restored, the praising of your name by a crowd of people who witnessed what had happened. Lord, we thank you for Luke's writing down the history. We thank you for his care for detail. May your word feed our faith. Cause us to rejoice as well, and in these times. How marvelous it is...the degree to which you love us. Amen