

Luke 7:1-17

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I often wonder: in the nearly 30 years, *before* Jesus began his ministry, how did he spend his time when he wasn't making furniture!?

Jesus was born in an obscure village into low status in Israelite society. He is thought to have been a carpenter like his human father Joseph, who may have been a highly skilled, artistic woodworker, but a laborer, nonetheless.

Embedded in Jesus' DNA is gossip about Jesus' teenaged mother, Mary, who got pregnant before she married Joseph, who wasn't Jesus' bio-Dad anyway. Only Joseph and Mary really knew 'who' was. Such 'shameful' things don't raise *any* family's social standing.

Did Jesus read a lot, do you think? Was he curious?
Who, besides his synagogue leaders, were his wisdom teachers?
Did *they* teach him to wonder? How to show up? Be present?

Was he 'one of the gang' as a teen, or did his peers avoid/tease him, call him a 'nerd'?

How did Jesus grow deep compassion for others?
Where did he learn to lift up the underdog, welcome the stranger?
Did Joseph and Mary teach him that?

Did Jesus dance? What did his laugh sound like?
Could he carry a tune? Did he chant in the synagogue?
Did he pray? What for?

How **did** Jesus come to be the Jesus in these stories we consider today?

He certainly embodied God in some way that you and I may not, yet he also walked this Earth in a human body, just as you and I do. And human bodies learn skills like walking and talking and hammering and loving and wondering by practicing them – by repeating the skills just the way we intend in order to manifest them somewhat consistently, tho' perhaps not always perfectly, in the future.

Oh, Amazing Grace, help me live like Jesus lived! -
Because his *ways* of thinking, living and being,
of speaking truth to people and the Empire,
changed people, changed structures and changed lives!

These 2 stories that Barb and Charlie read illustrate one of Luke's refrains: the all-inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry – a theme Luke often highlights in adjacent, contrasting stories, such as these.

In one story,

we have a poor, widowed mother.

a Jew;

the mother's only son is dead;
Jesus intercedes with the son, uninvited,
and speaks directly to the corpse,
who sits up and begins to speak;

In the other story

a wealthy male soldier;

a Gentile;

the honored slave is deathly sick;
the centurion requests healing;
Jesus notes the centurion's faith,
then the slave is 'found' in good health.

Keep in mind that Jesus' ministry is relatively new. Yet he's gathered disciples, is laying out his platform, is attracting crowds and gaining public acclaim as a healer, teacher and holy man. Many are following him from village to village. Many more, like the centurion, have heard *of* Jesus and, regardless of Jesus' low birth status, recognize his authority and are eager to see and hear him.

This centurion, a powerful, prestigious Roman soldier, publicly affirms Jesus as having a higher social status than he himself saying, "Lord . . . I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." Jesus honors this convention-breaking tribute, saying, ". . . not even in Israel have I found such faith." (It's important to remember that the word, **faith**, in the Bible implies *a relationship of trust and loyalty*. And **miracles** are primarily about *restoring right relationships*. They both require at least 2 willing parties.)

When the servant is 'found in good health', Jesus, his disciples and some of Jesus' ever-growing crowd of followers set off from Capernaum. After a 25 mile, full-day's walk, they come to the city called Nain. I imagine they're pretty tired and might prefer to rest.

But coming toward them is a somewhat typical funeral procession moving from inside the town, outside the city gates to the burial place, likely a cave in the hills. The young man was being carried on a bier, a palanquin-like stretcher carried by male pallbearers. The entire procession would traditionally have been led by the dead man's mother. The community was also gathered and joined the mourning and the procession.

When Jesus saw the mother, he had compassion for her. The phrase, "His heart went out to her," comes from a multi-syllabic Greek word with lots of consonants I cannot begin to pronounce. Literally it means to *have feelings in the bowels* (or other inner parts). We tend to make the heart the seat of emotions, but in Jesus time, emotions were centered in the bowels.

Jesus felt the mother's grief in his *gut*. And *still* he invited her not to weep. Not as if to say, "there, there, dear, get over yourself," but more, I imagine, because Jesus knew amazing joy was imminent. Stepping toward the bier, Jesus touched it, and said, "I say to you, rise!" And the young man arose and began to speak.

The word about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country!

Oh, Amazing Grace,
help us embrace and cultivate some of the qualities,
characteristics, and practices that Jesus embodied in these two stories:

Show up, fully present, no matter another person's status;
be approachable and respectful of boundaries *and* the moment.
Trust your inner authority.
See beyond social norms.
Finds words that are as powerful as your presence,
and articulate their meaning clearly;
Be courageous enough to speak on behalf of the voiceless,
especially when cultural/political/religious leaders attempt to silence them.
Listens to *all* people: strangers, friends, enemies, Jewish elders *and* Gentile friends.
Be observant.
Respond with compassion: listen and see with your gut,
from deep in the bowels of your bodyspirit.
Puts yourself in close proximity to another's needs.
Turn to wonder and Lead with Love!

To those ends, I offer you several invitations for practice:

- 1) Valerie Kaur's book, *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*.
- 2) Explore a recent event based on Kaur's work, The People's Inauguration,
and "explore what it is to extend love to all people without limit
and how opening our hearts in this way is both an ancient and radical act."
- 3) Sing the hymn verses we're about to sing every day this week.
Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known?
Will you let my Love be grown in you, and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell that fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound in you, and you in me?

Oh, Amazing Grace, help us live like Jesus lived! -
Because his *ways* of thinking, living and being,
of speaking truth to people and the Empire,
change people, change structures and change lives! Amen!