

## Mission Reflection

*for the Season of Pentecost*

Seafarers International House



### Scripture

Soon afterward he went to a city called Na'in, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.<sup>1</sup>

### Message

What seems to be missing from this Gospel is an expression of faith by the widow precipitating the resurrection of her only son.<sup>2</sup> We know that in biblical society a widow without sons, was doomed. There was no social institution or community that would come to her aid. It was only a matter of weeks before she starved or otherwise succumbed to the forces of nature. When Jesus encounters the funeral procession, the widow says nothing, but Jesus is moved, more by his compassion, than by any faith that this woman might have had, and returns her son to life.<sup>3</sup>

Jumping ahead two thousand years, we come to the millennials, people widely known as "spiritual, but not religious". Millennials (born between 1980 and 2000) figure largely in church discourse nowadays, written usually by "people much older than the generation in question,"<sup>4</sup> seeking to understand why they don't practice the faith of their parents. For millennials, traditional Christianity is little more than "moralistic therapeutic deism"<sup>5</sup>, where God coaches us through tough times, wants us to be happy and promises eternal life in heaven. It's not inspiring for them. At the same time, "spiritual, but not religious" tends to be self-centered and rarely pushes one out of his or her comfort zone.<sup>6</sup>

One way to engage millennials may be progressive theology, found in the Lutheran tradition and characterized by the humility to know that no one person can comprehend all that God is.<sup>7</sup> Doubt and questioning and dialogue are part of the Lutheran tradition. We believe that God calls us to strive for justice and to

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reform those institutions and behaviors which are harmful to society and its members. Millennials tend to be passionate about social justice.

Back to the Gospel, we have Jesus reflexively saving the widow by raising her son, seemingly without any pre-conditions. One theologian has opined that “[t]his is a wonderful story, but it is not easy for us to hear . . . We are invited to reflect upon how Jesus continues to heal our pain and our sorrow as we look toward the gift of eternal life.”<sup>8</sup> Really? I wonder whether the millennial approach might be more on target: to seek social justice and to reform those institutions and behaviors which are harmful to the widow, the poor, the ill and the disenfranchised.

It’s not just secular social work. It’s about loving God (even though we can’t cognitively understand Him), and it’s about loving and serving our neighbor whom we can cognitively understand). In this lifetime, we need only be the hands that do God’s work. Everything else can wait.

**Prayer**

Lord, help us to be faithful; help us to be humble, and help us to be courageous in serving others. Amen.

1. Luke 7:11-17
2. Rev. Michael Burns, Fox Valley Church of Christ, Momentum Ministries, Friday, March 12, 2010.
3. Ibid
4. Heather Dean, “Millenials and Lutheran Ethics: A Doorway Back Into Connection”, JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN ETHICS, April 1, 2016
5. Kendra Creasy Dean, ALMOST CHRISTIAN: WHAT THE FAITH OF OUR TEENAGERS IS TELLING THE AMERICAN CHURCH, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010
6. Dean, op cit
7. Ibid
8. Rev. Lucy Lind Hogan, Commentary on Luke 7:11-17, WORKING PREACHER, Lutheran Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 2016

**Postscript:** As the millennials likely recognize, the world today is not a very caring place for many of her people. Concomitantly, there is an abundance of opportunity for us to serve our neighbors near and far, including but by no means limited to, seafarers and immigrants. Log on to [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) and [www.sihnyc.org](http://www.sihnyc.org) to find your neighbor in need.

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It’s available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. “Sleep Well By Doing Good.”

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