

## High-Energy Collision

### Proper 5, Year C – Luke 7:11-17

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 9, 2013*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set them on fire with love for thee. Amen.

A complex of laboratories and administrative offices somewhere in the northwest suburbs of Geneva, Switzerland is the headquarters of C.E.R.N., the European Organization for Nuclear Research. (The acronym only works in French.) The real work of the organization, however, goes on in a 16 and a half mile long circular tunnel dug average of 300 feet underground, spanning the Swiss-French border. The 12-foot wide concrete tunnel is home to the Large Hadron Collider, a collection of tubing and wiring and more than 1,600 superconducting electro-magnets designed to accelerate streams of atomic particles to up to seven trillion electron-volts, making them move at just a hair under the speed of light. I'm not really sure what that means. Oh, who am I kidding – I have absolutely no *idea* what that means, but it sounds really, really awesome.

Actually, the LHC is not just designed to achieve such acceleration, but to accelerate some going that fast clockwise, and some going that fast counter-clockwise, and then *smashing* them together. The results of *that* kind of high-energy collision fly everywhere. All sorts of things: leptons, and gluons, and even the still-elusive Higgs boson, the so-called “God Particle,” go flying in all sorts of directions: symmetric, super-symmetric, Poincaré symmetric, whatever *that* is, releasing previously unknowable energies, and helping the scientists that run the place learn all sorts of lessons about how the universe got started, and how it keeps going.

In our lesson from the Gospels this morning, Luke tells us about a collision of another sort – one that took place just outside a town called Nain. Two streams collided at the city gate as a procession of sorrow and death met a procession of life and hope. At the front of one was a man who had been defeated by death. At the front of the other was a man who was on a mission to defeat death.

Death and sorrow were streaming out of the village the day Jesus came to town. Already deprived of her support, deprived of her status in the community, deprived of her *future* by the loss of her husband, death had taken the one remaining light from the life of the widow of Nain. As the procession of death and sorrow streamed toward the grave, it picked up its own awful energy as family and friends and neighbors joined the wailing procession to the gates of the village and beyond. As they multiplied the widow's grief with their own, they each asked their own questions. “What will happen when my own loved one dies?” “What will happen when *I* die?” “What will happen to my *loved ones* when I die?” And so the whole of the community was thrown together into the river of weeping, into the cacophony of mourning, into the depth of death and despair.

And of course we know such processions all too well, not only because we have all too often been part of similar ones, but because we are all quite literally a part of the self-same procession that was going out of Nain that day. That procession could be going out of any city or town in the world at any time in human history. That procession is going on right this second... and this one... and this one. The children of Eve in every corner of the world return again and again and again to the dust from which we were formed.

And that simple fact is made only more tragic by the reality that it is our *own* doing. We are all of us on an inevitable and persistent *collision* course with death because of the indisputable fact that from the beginning, and over and over again, we and all our kind have rebelled against the One who set every life, every *particle*, into motion. By our own violent hands, by our wrong decisions and our willful disobedience, by our “chance” encounters with a natural order broken and twisted by human sin, by the dreadful deafening drumbeat of disease and decay, from Abel to the last procession before the last day, every living thing is headed out the gate to the burial ground, *every* life is on that same collision course with death.

Because of death, our hearts are all too often broken. Because of death, our dreams are too soon shattered. Because of death, our tears are too inescapably numerous. Since the way to the garden was closed to our first parents, death is the last and great enemy of humankind, and the procession out the gate goes on and on and on.

But there was another procession that day in Nain. You see, at the same time death and sorrow and sin were streaming *out* of Nain, forgiveness and joy and life were streaming *in*. As the mourners bore the funeral bier out the gates that day, they were met by the young miracle worker from Nazareth leading his own procession of triumph and expectation. Death met life that day. Sorrow met hope that day. When Jesus, the eternal Son of God, *and* the earthborn son of Mary, saw the grieving widow of Nain, Luke tells us, his heart went out to her. “Do not weep,” he said. And then the Lord reached out, and issued a simple command. “Young man,” he said, “rise up.” And the young man rose up.

Death and sorrow were streaming out of Nain that day. Life and hope were streaming in. Death and sorrow collided with life and hope that day, and everything changed. The Lord of Life spoke to both the living and the dead – and both obeyed. The people who saw it were filled with awe and praised God, Luke tells us. “God has come to help his people,” they exclaimed. And we hear that the word spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country. And maybe that was enough... for *that* day.

But the Lord of Life wasn't finished. Jesus wasn't sent by his Father to bring only a *short-term* solution for death. He through whom all things were made, came to live among *us* for no smaller mission than to completely and forever *destroy* death's power. On the Cross of Calvary, our Redeemer, the buyer-back of humanity, took away the *cause* of death. And by walking away from the rock-hewn tomb of his *own* death, our Savior conquered and defeated and *destroyed* death for all time, for the whole human race.

The results of *that* high-energy collision flew literally *everywhere*, releasing previously *unknowable* power, and helping the whole world learn all sorts of lessons. Lessons about the God who created the whole universe, and about his love for us beyond the limits of our imagination, and about how because of that love, we can shout with our brother Paul, “O death, where is your victory! O grave, where is your sting!” So that, “even at the grave we make our song, Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!”