

June 9 2013

**Scripture Lesson** ~ 1 Kings 17:8-9,17-24

Luke 7:11-17

**Sermon**      *Snatched from the Jaws of Death*

I was just reminded on the news this week that 24 years ago this month, I was watching the evening news and trying to catch up with what was going on those student protestors in China. Video footage, I did say footage, because that is what it was in those days, was scarce but one reporter was able to smuggle some of that video tape out of the country. The reporter was still in China and the anchor man had just received the tape and trying desperately by telephone to clarify with the reporter of what exactly we were watching on our television screen.

I am sure that some of this going to be familiar to you. There were many scenes showing student protestors battling with the army but one such scene struck me or stuck in my mind than another scene that I saw that day. It showed that long column of Chinese army tanks making their way through the nearly empty Tiananmen Square in Beijing China. Very few people were in view in the camera when all of sudden a lone young student marched out into the square and placed himself right in front of the first tank in the column. You remember this scene. It just blew me away and when he saw the young man the driver of the first tank swerved to one side but the student went with him and placed himself back in the tank's path. The driver swerved the other side only to have the same student to put himself square in front of the tank again. This went on for several seconds until finally the driver of the first tank just plain stopped and the student climbed up triumphantly aboard for just a few more seconds and climbed back down again and started to slowly walk away.

Then you remember what happened, the man's friends ran out into the street and grabbed him and there were three of them and dragged him back out of the way. They picked him up and literally carried him back as fast as they could out of the way of that tank that day. The young man's friends had literally snatched him out of the jaws of death, Jaws, which as we saw that summer many of his comrades were not so lucky to escape from.

In Charles Dickens classic story of Ebenezer Scrooge which we are familiar at Christmas time. The Christmas Carol which begins by awakening the same reality that the friends of the student knew all throughout that shocking of defiance. That death is a part of life and not ever far away from any of us whether we are young or whether we are old or whether we are some place in between. These

words that Dickens wrote at the beginning of the book, Marle was dead to begin with and there was no doubt about that. The registrar of the burial was signed by the clerk and the clergy and by undertaker and the chief mourner and Scrooge signed it and Scrooge's name was good for anything that he put his hand to. Old Marle was dead as a door nail.

As we look back at the passage from Luke's Gospel that Joan read from us this morning we find that it too begins with the same reality as Dickens's book does. A widow from the city of Nain in Jesus' own region of Galilee had lost her only son. Her son was dead and there was no two ways about it. The story even tells us that when Jesus came in contact with the boy's mother, the boy was on his way to burial in the midst of this funeral procession. There was more than one death being mourned that day, not only was the mother feeling dead inside herself because the death of her son but she was no doubt gripped with deathly fear for herself wondering what she would do when all these things had settled. She was a widow and her only son was dead and unless she had other relatives to take care of her she might be destitute for the rest of her life as there was no such thing as Social Security and there were no reputable jobs for older women especially at that point in her life.

But in this scene of death and into this scene of mourning comes Jesus. The scriptures tell us he had compassion on the widow and he comforted and calmed her by saying, "do not weep". But Jesus did more than just calm and comfort the widow in her hour of grief because he like friends of that Chinese feisty student reached out his hand and snatched that widow's son back, back from the jaws of death. And not only the boy but the mother as well, a woman who in her grief was good as dead in the eyes of the world around her.

Why in the world do you suppose, did Jesus bother to stop that day to help the woman and her son. Well I think for the simple reason, our God, the God of Jesus Christ is a loving God; our God is a just God; Our God is a God of compassion and like the friends of the Chinese man, Jesus loved the widow and her son so much that he pulled them both back from the jaws of death into new life. Throughout the history of our relationship of God. God has snatched each one of us back from the jaws of evil; jaws of death.

God, you remember God saved Noah and his family from the waters of the flood. God gave Abraham and Sarah a son where there was only barrenness in the past. God rescued the Children of Israel from Pharaoh chariots by giving Moses the power to part that sea. God gave David that power to defeat Goliath and the armies of the Philistines. God spared Daniel in the midst of the lion's den and finally, God through his son Jesus raised the dead. God fed the hungry. God defeated once for all the power of sin and of death.

But what about today? How do we know if God operates in the same way today as God did in the time of Jesus? How does God snatch us back from the jaws of death in our day? To answer this question all we have to do look within and around ourselves in the world in which we live because I think very time an alcoholic that relies on the 12 steps to give up drinking, God has snatched that person back, back from the jaws of death. I think every time a suicidal youth finds the reason to live compassion of a parent, or a teacher or a youth leader God has snatched that teenager back from the jaws of death. Every time a widow or widower is able to start functioning again after the death of their spouse because he or she believes God's promises of eternal life, God has snatched that person back from the jaws of death. Every time a cancer patient has picked up his or her life to go on after treatment come what may God has snatched that patient back from the jaws of death, and finally, every time a new life comes kicking and screaming into this world I think God has snatched all of us back from the jaws of death.

Yes, our God is a God of love; our God is a God of compassion; Our God is a God of hope and peace in this ever troubled world. And we as God's disciples we can be a part of the problem or we can be part of the solution to life's ills because we have to keep reminding ourselves time and time again that the ark wasn't built without Noah's skill and Abraham and Sarah didn't have a son out of the clear blue sky. They had to cooperate. Israel wasn't saved from Pharaoh without Moses leadership. Goliath wasn't killed without David's little sling. And God didn't save this little world of ours without coming into it; getting himself dirty and having compassion on its people; and making the supreme sacrifice to snatch each one of us back from the jaws of death. Like the children when you are facing with an impossible situation I can't promise what miracles may occur but I can tell you that God is there to snatch each one of us back from the jaws of death.

Together we say AMEN