

CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

Week 2: Raised



SIGNS OF THE
KINGDOM OF GOD

January 31 - February 14

KEY POINT

Jesus brings life to outsiders, just as he brings life to us all. In today's stories, Jesus is drawn into interactions with outsiders—two people on the margins of Jewish society. One outsider is powerful and well connected (the centurion) while another is facing poverty and great loss (the widow). In both situations, Jesus recognizes their pain and offers miraculous healing that transforms their worlds. No matter what our position in life, God is willing and able to reach us where we are and offer healing for our grief.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 7:1-17

Psalms 119:105-107

OPENING PRAYER

Healing God, you see us in all our brokenness. No matter where we are, whom we include or exclude, you reach out to us where we dwell. You find us no matter where we may be hidden. Seek us out now, in this space, that we may hear your words and see your glory in the Son you sent to us, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

READ

Luke 7:1-17

ABOUT THE STORY

Today's stories bring us from Jesus' great sermon in Luke 6:17-49 to powerful stories of healing and resurrection. As will be done through most of the Gospels, Jesus' compassionate teachings and challenges will be tied up with his miraculous healings and exorcisms. The coming of the kingdom of God happens on mental, emotional, and physical levels.

There are many cultural and historical nuances in today's stories, which make the interactions between Jesus and those seeking healing even more complex. The centurion (Luke 7:1-10) is a Roman military commander, the local symbol of oppressive force and power. He is also a Gentile, a non-Jewish person who is therefore excluded from synagogue and temple worship. He should be the enemy of the local Jewish elders. Yet instead, he loves the Jewish people, builds their synagogues, treats their elders and rabbis with great respect, and cares for his slaves.

In the same way, the widow's story (Luke 7:11-17) is made even more tragic in context. With the death of her son, she loses not only her only child, but also her access to social and economic support. Women without husbands or children relied entirely on the kindness and hospitality of their communities; their security and safety was often in danger. A childless widow would be considered the most needy in society, with no close male relatives to protect or support her. When Jesus touches her dead son, he breaks a law against contact with dead bodies (Numbers 19:11-13), making him ritually unclean.

Just as Jesus has been previously willing to break tradition around the Sabbath, Jesus shows himself willing to go outside the boundaries of Jewish religion and ritual purity in order to heal those on the edges of the community. God's miraculous healing is not just for those on the inside, but for all of us.

First Lutheran
CHURCH
Where faith and life meet

SHARE

- Today's story features some surprising outsiders who do not go unnoticed by Jesus. Sometimes being an outsider is not a moral judgment but rather a description of unfortunate circumstances that have left someone out, for no real fault of their own. Where have you heard stories of outsiders this week? Who do you think are currently outsiders in your country, your community, even your church?
- Jesus says, "Do not weep"—not a kind thing to say to someone who has lost their son! Of course, Jesus will give her a good reason not to cry. When has someone said something to you while you were grieving that was not helpful? How were they trying to help?
- The centurion believes Jesus can command health and sickness the same way the centurion commands soldiers. Is this true? Where does it work as a metaphor, and where does it fail?

PRAY

Jesus: healer, forgiver, restorer, we celebrate your divine bravery. Bravery that saw that boundaries between Gentile and Jew, slave and free, women and men, even dead and alive are not the final rules of the world God made. Bravery that healed a soldier's slave and a widow's only son. As we go from here, make us brave too, to cross the lines that have kept others out, and to forgive those who long for healing and wholeness. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

BLESS

Mark one another with the sign of the cross on your hand and say, "God be with you as you listen, learn, and pray this week. Amen."

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Jesus is amazed by the faith of the centurion, who believes that Jesus has the kind of power over health that the centurion has over his soldiers. In prayer this week, think about asking for an increase of radical trust—belief that, despite any evidence to the contrary, God does have the power to work miracles.
- Jesus is able to see and respond to pain in outsiders of many kinds. When are you an insider? When are you an outsider? How do you see the love of God showing up in both?
- For both the sick slave and the dead son, help comes without their knowledge. Someone else crosses paths with Jesus and moves him to compassion and care. Someone in your circle of friends, family, or co-workers may need that same kind of advocacy and not know how to ask for it. This week, listen for someone who may be suffering unheard, and recognize how you can use your own position and power to bring them to a safer place.

