

Good Morning – I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Phillip one of Jesus' disciples – although at the time we didn't really think of ourselves as disciples. Well, I sure didn't. I just wanted to be near Him and being near Him you ended near this whole bunch of, for the most part, great guys. It felt like a family – a strange family, but a family.

I was there that evening – in Nain – when Jesus brought that young man back to life. It was amazing and really helped spread the word about who Jesus was. Of course then they thought he was a prophet like Elijah or Elisha, which was a pretty good start. “God has looked favorably on his people” everyone shouted. Joy erupted all around that widow. We, the disciples, sort of stood back and took it all in. Don't think we weren't amazed along with everyone else. We were, truly. But, well, we were only human and we had mixed feelings.

See if you can understand. Jesus was constantly on the move – that evening we had been walking for two days. Everyone of us was glad to see the gates to the town. It meant that in a few minutes, maybe an hour, we'd be sitting down, possibly eating, sharing a jug of wine, smiling at the innkeepers daughter. Our journey for the day was over. So we're making our way through the gates, staying as far from the funeral cortege as possible – dead bodies were to be avoided at all costs – unclean. And this we could see was a widow burying her only son – soon she would be one of the outcasts. This just wasn't the kind of thing you wanted to get involved with. I was at the front – probably a sign of how hungry I was – and I felt the crowd behind me lighten. When I looked back I could see Jesus approaching the crying widow. I heard my inner groan, “Oh, no, Jesus – not now. Oh, God, he's going up to the dead body – what's he doing. He's touching the casket. Oh, no.” I thought. Part of me was concerned about Jesus' reputation – touching dead bodies, and another part of me was tired and hungry. “Oh, no.”

And then the Son sat up, and started talking, looking healthy and hearty. No could believe it. All of us disciples kept looking at each other, puzzled, amazed, humbled – and, at least for me, not hungry. That wasn't such an extraordinary day for us. No matter where we were – Jesus would always find the most unacceptable person in the crowd and approach them. There's a Samaritan woman at a well, we all hurry past – you know what those Samaritans are like – but Jesus heads right over to her. We've got three houses who asked us to have dinner with them – and who does he pick? The tax collector.

We are hurrying through Jericho trying to get closer to Jerusalem before dark – and it was slow going so many people crowded around him – I heard someone call, Son of David, Have mercy on me. We all hushed him – he yelled out again, louder. Jesus heard him. He was a blind beggar – the dregs. Why did he always pick these people – and touch them? Why always in front of a huge crowd.

When that handsome rich young man asked for help, Jesus just told him a story – a story about a Good Samaritan and a selfish Priest! I mean, what was he trying to do. Once, in the market place, all these lepers appear – everyone was trying to shoo them away – they were not supposed to be in with regular people. I saw one grab a loaf of bread that had been trampled on by others and start eating it. Disgusting! By now you know what happened, inside my head, I'm yelling, “No, Jesus, no. Can't you see they are lepers?” But, he just went on. Stepped in, stopped the shopkeeper from yelling at the lepers

and then he, Jesus, turned to them and made them well. Really, skin as smooth as silk. I still didn't touch them – you don't go from bad to good that fast.

I could go on and on like this – the woman of doubtful virtue anointing him, the bleeding woman who touched him, the crippled woman – women! And the children! No matter how tight our schedule – he seemed to want no life of his own – you know what I mean – even that hour or two at the day's end when you stare into the fire, let yourself relax – ah, the day is done.

And I was never sure if he saw this pattern – that it was always the outcast, the least acceptable that he picked to approach. The thing with him was that he saw all the people everyone else missed. I admit sometimes we saw them, but just wanted to get away without having to engage, maybe just toss a coin in their bowl. But Jesus, didn't want to just give someone bread or oil. He wanted to change them, and he did. I guess he changed me, too. Why did he ask me to follow him? I was such a wanderer – mostly looking for food – well, I admit I still have that tendency. That day at Nain, I would have passed that widow by for some bread and some fish. Jesus never sees a dead end, never accepts that he cannot do something.

I know, you aren't the first to ask, "If Jesus brought back the widow's son – can he revive my daughter, can he cure the illness of my husband, my own heart disease." And he did bring people back - Lazarus, Peter's Mother in Law, the little girl. And still the world around him, around us, is full of death, full of illness. Why? Why not my mother, my child, my spouse? I don't know.

But I know Jesus is constantly bringing things back to life. He has touched dead places in me – depression, despair – and I have risen up. He has helped me find the love that overflows in the midst of grief. Comforted me when the sorrow of an imminent death felt it would swallow me alive. He has taken death and created life from it – people who respond to their losses by trying to change the world. From things as big as your Mothers Against Drunk Driving to as small as a tulip planted in honor of a lost one. I know for me times of great grief have been the times of my closest connection with God. The times of sorrow in my life - those were the times when I learned compassion - when I received the tenderest care and where I learned how to tend for others. Nothing dies without bringing new life. Nothing.

Jesus gave new life to that widow, her son, that day. Who knows how their lives will play out – certainly they will hold them with more wonder, more gratitude. And they again will die. And be mourned. And God will be with them, as God has from the beginning of time. Let us hear how our ancestors put it in the beauty of a psalm.