



I realize this is more of a Bible Study sermon than what you're used to, but learning about funerals is important. Hear a few words on cremation. Aside from the fact that in the Bible there is never a single instance of cremation that is blessed by God, whenever there is a burning of a body it is instead because of God's judgment. Think about those who weren't buried in the Bible. Think of Jezebel in 1 and 2 Kings. Jezebel conspired to have innocent Naboth stoned because he wouldn't sell his vineyard to her husband, King Ahab. Because Jezebel did this, the Lord pronounced this judgment in **1 Kings 21:23**, "**The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.**" Fast forward to **2 Kings 9:35-37** after she had been thrown out a window to her death, "**But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands.**"<sup>36</sup> **When they came back and told him (that is, Jehu), he said, 'This is the word of the LORD, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite: 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel,**<sup>37</sup> **and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.'**" Notice that they intended to bury her as was proper even though she was a wicked person, but God's judgment was so severe that dogs consumed her entirety wiping her and her memory off the face of the earth.

Jezebel may not have been cremated, but do you remember what happened to Achan and his sons? After Jericho fell, Achan stole some of the things devoted for destruction (**Jo 7:11**). The punishment for this transgression was as recorded in **Joshua 7:25**, "**They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones.**" Fire and burning are signs of judgment. In **Matthew 13**, Jesus explains the parable of the weeds saying, "**The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,**<sup>42</sup> **and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**" (vv. 41-42). Fire and burning are theological expressions of God's judgment. We don't want to confess anything close to this for a beloved Christian who dies in the faith!

Now, does the Bible say it's a sin to be cremated? No, I'm not suggesting that. We should never make laws where God has not made any. But the Bible is clear that a funeral and burial best confesses the sure hope the Christian has in God's forgiveness of sins and His promise to raise the body in the resurrection. It's also interesting to know that the first cremation in this country didn't take place until 1876. And that person was outspokenly anti-Christian, stating in his funeral wishes that no priest or clergymen officiate it. My point here is, don't think that cremation was introduced by anything remotely Christian. It's been part of our culture for so long now that most people haven't even thought twice about it. My point today is to at least get you thinking about it.

I realize some of you may have already gone through with a cremation of a loved one. Don't despair. Again, I'm not saying it is a sin. I'm saying moving forward there is a better way to treat our temples of the Holy Spirit to glorify God and His promises post-mortem (**1 Cor 6:19**). No matter what, though, I'd encourage you not to keep Grandma Schmidt's ashes on the mantle or throw her remains in her favorite lake. Bury them in a cemetery. Do you know where the word cemetery comes from? A Greek word meaning "dormitory", that is, a place of sleep. Cemeteries are dorm rooms for the dead. The Christian confesses that death is but a sleep. **1 Corinthians 15:51**, "**Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.**" V. 53, "**For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.**" The body – your body – will be raised. Cemeteries, then, aren't scary places, but places of true comfort and hope! As our country moves farther and farther away from Christianity, you can confess to the world that Christ will call your body out of your grave, just as He did with Lazarus, and just as He did with the young man in our Gospel reading from Luke 7 today!

And that's exactly what we celebrate on this 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity. Today is like the Easter Sunday of the Trinity Season. After Jesus had compassion on the mother, He told her to stop weeping (**Lk 7:13**). There would be a time to weep, but today was not it. That day in the town of Nain was going to be a day of joy. Jesus' next words after touching the bier were, "**Young man, I say to you, arise.**" **And the dead one sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother (Lk 7:15).**

Now, you'd think the joy would be immediate, but the next thing the text says is, "**Fear seized them all**" (**Lk 7:16**). Why fear? Because the omnipotence and presence of God always espouses fear. God's presence always reminds us how small we are in relation to His almightiness. But the fear factor wasn't the only thing in that

sentence in Luke 7:16. We, too, after our brains caught up with our eyes and ears would glorify God saying, “God has visited His people!”

Good News: we don't have to wait til the Last Day. God visits His people every time two or more are gathered in His name (**Mt 18:20**). God visits you, His people, in Word and Sacrament. Yes, the culmination of it all will take place on the Last Day. Those of us in the grave, Christ will call us by name! And our physical bodies will rise up to eternal life with Christ Jesus in heaven! But you don't have to wait til then to have the joy of salvation. By faith, it is yours now. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.