

Nain was just a couple of miles from Nazareth.

Jesus and his followers were out for a day-trip

songs of praise, wonderful stories with the strong message

that God loved the least and the last like a tender father.

As they swanned into Nain on an undoubted high

they chanced upon a wailing procession on an undoubted low,

joy and grief all mixed up outside that walled and gated village.

It was really, really bad, caught by Luke in just a few words.

A young man dead before his time,

the only son of his mother, and she a widow.

Her boy would have been her security in her old age.

Now she'd have to beg, steal or borrow,

crying for herself as well as for him.

Jesus' reaction is a strong one, literally gutted in Greek.

Not least because this was calling his bluff about God's love

in that there didn't seem much of that love in this situation.

I wonder also if his strong reaction reflected a revulsion
to nature red in tooth and claw where only the fittest survived,
with a fierce determination to dramatically reverse the trend
‘The weak go to oblivion. In some ways it is quite terrifying.
Couldn’t God have done better than to make the earth
some giant mouth which devours increasingly
in order to sustain itself?’ (*R S Thomas*)

‘Young man, I say to you arise.’ And he does.
Paralysing grief, crippling poverty assuaged in 4 Greek words.
‘Talitha cum,’ Jesus says to Jairus’ daughter in Mark’s Gospel.
Just two Aramaic words, get up little one. And she does.
‘Lazarus, come out,’ just three words in John’s Gospel.
And he does, despite rotting in the tomb for four days.
That’s all the resurrection miracles Jesus performs,
each raising the stakes.
A girl dead in bed, a son on a bier, a friend buried in a tomb.

Christ doesn't muck about. No comforting words,
no clever theories dying the death of a thousand qualifications.

He just does it - as God just did it
with a mangled crucified body in a stone cold tomb.

Bang. He is raised. Argument over.

In her final interview before her death,
Hilary Mantel was asked if she believed in an afterlife.
She did, but admitted she couldn't imagine how it might work.
'However, the universe is not limited by what I can imagine.'

That widow of Nain was in the pits.

Betsie ten Boom declared shortly before dying in Ravensbrück,
'There is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still.'

Imagine Christ, a man of few words saying on days
when death looms large, when the fever of life is over,
the shadows lengthen and our busy world is hushed,
'Talitha cum. - Little one, get up.'

The hymn writer, Charles Wesley,
composed this verse on his death-bed:

*In age and feebleness extreme,
Who shall a helpless worm redeem?
Jesus, my only hope thou art,
Strength of my failing flesh and heart.
O could I catch one smile from Thee
and drop into eternity.*