

He's called the man with the golden arm. No, not a pitcher in baseball. Just a man who has made 1101 blood donations. Now alone regularly donating blood would be wonderful. But the very first time he donated, doctors noticed something. His blood was special. There is a disease in some pregnant woman's blood which attacks their unborn baby's blood cells. This man's special blood had an antibody that could stop that so babies wouldn't die. Since 1967 expectant mothers whose babies could die from this disease receive this blood and their baby lives.

In these cases when death and life collide there is a small victory for life. Without this miracle blood death would win. Death seems to always win. It removes all hope. Death is so final, so complete, something that people can't recover from. When it happens we even talk about the person in the past tense. So how are we supposed to cling to faith as death approaches or after it's already struck? In our lives it seems that when death and life collide death wins.

That was the situation in the gospel. Jesus, the very embodiment of life, was making his way toward a city called Nain. His disciples and a crowd were following him. That's when there was a collision. It was a big impact and still impacts us.

When death and life collide
Sorrow turns to joy
Death turns to life

November 26, 1986. I was in second grade at Cleveland Elementary School. I don't remember what subject we were in when I got called out of the classroom. My mom was in the hallway. She was supposed to be at work, not here in school. Something was wrong. Mom had been crying. She walked my sister and me to the car and broke the news, Grandpa Born had died. We drove up the street silently about two miles to my Grandma and Grandpa's house. My dad was there with red eyes from crying. So was my Grandma Born. It was my first memory of what death means. I don't remember the last time I saw my Grandpa, but now almost 31 years later I can still remember the realization that set in. I wasn't going to see him again. Death and life collided and death won and left only sorrow.

At the head of the funeral procession out of the city of Nain walked the mother. In front of her was the stretcher carrying the body of her dead son. Behind her loud wails and cries could be heard from the mourners. Sorrow was the order of the day. Sorrow on top of sorrow. **"The only son of his mother, and she was a widow."** This woman had no one now. Only son, dead. Husband already dead. Means of supporting herself gone. Nothing could change this sorrow. Nothing could bring back her dead.

At the head of the procession coming into the city of Nain was Jesus. Behind him was a great crowd of followers. Figuratively in front of him was much grief and suffering as he made his way ultimately to the cross. But as he walked on that day he was life in the flesh. **"When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, Don't cry."** He knew her sorrow. Death and life collided. Jesus spoke compassionately to her. Don't cry. Dry your tears. But how? Other than words, Jesus was asking her to believe him in a situation that called for the opposite. His first command would be foolish if it wasn't followed by an even greater command. That command directed to the young boy turned her sorrow to joy.

In the years after 1986 there were times I was paralyzed with sorrow over the death of my Grandpa. I was just getting to know him and then he was gone. I thought about him a lot. I cried. There was a hole with hurt and heartache that never got filled. If you've experienced the death of someone close to you then maybe you know that feeling. Death strikes and it can leave us feeling lost. Almost like all hope is lost. We can respond with anger and resentment. Worry too. What will we do now? How will we carry on? What will be our new reality? Sorrow just keeps coming and gets overwhelming. We might even get mad at God. He took our loved one away. How could he be so cruel? And then to think he'll do the same to us someday. It doesn't seem fair. It doesn't seem right.

When death and life collided near the city gate, death in the young boy on the stretcher and life in Christ Jesus, it was epic. The sorrow of the mother and mourners turned to joy. She heard a promise and received the reality of that promise immediately. You have a promise from Jesus for hope and joy. With that promise even death's sorrow turns to joy. You can cry, but it isn't uncontrollable 'everything is lost' kind of crying. Jesus tells you to dry your tears. Life, Jesus, comes to your aid. Hope comes from outside you. Jesus knows your pain and sees your sorrow when someone dies or when anything bad happens to you. He knows exactly what you face and what you need. You need a Savior. You need hope based in forgiveness. You need promises that assure you Jesus himself has turned your sorrow to joy. Jesus did it for you because Jesus himself once faced death and came back to life. His resurrection guarantees your sorrow will be turned to joy.

There was a reason for her sorrow to turn to joy. It wasn't based on nothing. Jesus wasn't asking her to step out onto a bridge that she couldn't see. This wasn't blind faith. This was telling her to have joy, dry the tears. He would do something about this that no one saw coming. Death and life collided and for once in these people's lives death had to give way to life. Death turned to life.

Things happened fast after Grandpa Born died. Days later we gathered at the funeral home. There I saw my Grandpa again. My parents asked if I wanted to go up to the coffin. I didn't know. So they led me there in front of the casket. I stood with my family staring at my Grandpa, yet not him. Grandma hugged me, dad and mom hugged me. I sat down in the front row of chairs. I'm sure plenty of family came and talked with me. But I don't remember. I just knew that as much as I wanted that moment to change, it couldn't. Grandpa was dead and nothing would reverse that.

The young boy was dead. Nothing would reverse that. Until death collided with life. **"Then Jesus went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, Young man, I say to you, get up!"** Jesus spoke to the young boy as if he could hear him and obey. He spoke as if he were merely sleeping on that stretcher. But he wasn't sleeping. Jesus changed that young boy's death into mere sleep by his own power and will. He raised him back to life with a word. Once the boy sat up and started talking, like young boys do, Jesus gave him back to his mother. Mom received a gift, her son was alive because of Jesus. The compassion that started for the mother who lost her son was completed when death turned to life.

I know it isn't something we like to think about. The reality is at some point each of us will be like that young boy. We'll be in the same position. Dead in a coffin or urn. Does that cause fear? Uncontrolled worry? Each day can be seen as an endless stream of possibilities for death. Our minds can wander to how it will happen, will it hurt, will it be slow or fast. We might take extraordinary steps to prevent it from happening. Some steps might not be sinful, but some could defy God and be sinful. And in the end we won't succeed. Death will claim us. The biggest question then, is death victorious?

The unseen but ever present visitor at each funeral is the Lord Jesus. He'll be at your funeral too. Of that you can be sure. His presence will be for comfort. He'll comfort those who mourn. That comfort will be reality only because Jesus turned death for all believers to life by his saving work. The promise of life for you after death is based in his resurrection. Death will lose its grip on you because death collides with life and life is victorious.

You wait for a miracle in joy and hopeful expectation because life changes everything. Jesus changes everything. Even as your body will one day experience death, there will be life. In Christ Jesus, the one who gives life, your death will merely be sleep from which you will rise. Take comfort in the truth that Jesus will call you to life. Believe and trust in Jesus who raises the dead including you. Feel that comfort and experience that hope today. You can feel joy in knowing eternal life in heaven is yours in Christ. You can have hope in the victory of Christ. He is the life and when he meets death, death turns to life.

James Harrison is the man with the golden arm. He's been donating his miracle blood and over two million babies have lived. There, death collides with life and life seems to prevail. But we know it's temporary. Each of those children will still die someday. Death still seems to win. But on a day when the crowd following the dead boy collided with the crowd following the author of life Jesus Christ, death yielded. Death lost. Life declared victory. Jesus gives a promise to you that for as long as you live you hold his promise that sorrow turns to joy in him. And when your death comes it will collide with life, and because of Christ your death will turn to life.