

A large crowd – a hundred? a thousand? five thousand? Only two times that I know of are we told how many people are crowded around Jesus – those two times are when the crowd was fed with a little bread and some dried fish. One time five thousand men were fed not counting the women and children and the other time four thousand people in all were fed. Jesus attracted very large crowds.

Luke tells us that Jesus and his disciples went to a town called Nain and a large crowd went with him.

The few times I have been in large crowds were shoulder to shoulder trying to hear and see or are all on their way somewhere. Jesus was the reason that the people were together – everyone wanted to be close to him.

Ever been on a tour group at a museum or walking around an historic sight? How close to the leader do you need to be to see and to hear?

Jesus, the twelve and a large crowd. No amplifiers, no giant video screens to bring everyone up close to the action. At the edge of the village of Nain the large crowd with Jesus met another large crowd – a funeral procession. The body of the only son of a widow was being carried to the grave. Jesus had compassion on her.

In that time and place a woman depended on the men in her life. They could hold property, she could not. They could earn money – she could not in any respectable way. To be a childless widow was to be a beggar.

Jesus had compassion on her – stopped the procession – touched the funeral bier – said, “Young man, I say to you, rise! The dead man sat up and began to speak and gave him to his mother.

If only we could have been there – right in the front of that crowd – seen all of this with our own eyes. Faith would be so easy then.

In both of those large crowds how many were able to see with their own eyes that day? I suppose it depends on how high they were carrying the body –if they were carrying like we carry a stretcher maybe forty or fifty could hear and see. Beyond those people the word must have spread quickly. And some believed, and I am guessing some did not. Just the way it was here this day as this story was read – some believed and some did not.

Some among us would believe most anything – some among us would doubt most anything. Most are somewhere in the middle.

A phone call or an e-mail comes promising wealth if you but do this or that. Some among us are skeptical – some are ready to believe. That readiness has been very costly to some.

But so is skepticism. It can lead to trusting no one. The skeptic will never be fooled but misses out on a lot of joy.

That day some were right up front – we can assume the disciples were. You would think that that having seen something like this would change everything. But on the day when another procession was leaving a city they were way, way back.

That day it was not a funeral but procession of three condemned men carrying crosses. The large crowds had gotten lost somewhere along the way. Soldiers and robbers and those who hated Jesus followed him that day. A stranger, coming in from the country – Simon of Cyrene – was stopped by the soldiers and made to carry Jesus cross.

True believers and skeptics all failed Jesus that day.

And now? What do you think matters more to God – what we say we believe or do not believe – or whether the love and forgiveness and compassion of Jesus is in our words and deeds? In Hitler's Germany Lutherans and Catholics who knew their catechisms by heart were among those who resisted Hitler and the slaughter. And Lutherans and Catholics who knew their catechisms by heart were among those who supported the slaughterers. Does it matter to God?

Jesus will decide. Not me – not you – not even what we say about Jesus but Jesus himself will decide. When each of us has been carried to our grave Jesus will decide. He has power to raise the dead whether we believe or not. He has power.

Even more important he has compassion. That is what I am counting on – that Jesus who saw a widow in her need and raised her son will see me in my need and raise me out of the death my sin deserves and will give me life that only he deserves.

I am counting on the same for you. Amen.