

The Jesus I Want to Know:
The Resurrection and Life
John 11:32-44

March 13, 2005

Once upon a time there was a man whose name was Lazarus. He owned a nice home in the little town of Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem. Mary and Martha were his sisters. Jesus liked to spend his spare time with these three close friends. He who lamented that He had no place to lay His head found friendship and hospitality there. Martha was a great cook. Mary gave relaxing massages. Lazarus proved to be an insightful friend. What more could anyone want?

Then one day Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was seriously ill. Such is the setting for the Jesus we encounter in the 11th Chapter of John. Come let's take a look.

JESUS WAITED. In Verse 6 we read, "*When he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*"

I know of no one who likes to be put on hold. In a lifetime, the average American will spend five years waiting in line, two years returning phone calls, eight months opening junk mail, and six months staring at traffic lights. In spite of our technological advancements, the first words on the computer screen are often "Please wait" and the first answer to a business phone call is "Please hold."

It's one thing to wait when waiting is an inconvenience. It's quite another matter when someone is dying. So Martha sits by the bed of Lazarus anxiously looking out the window wondering why it's taking Jesus so long. At the funeral, the absence of a best friend complicates her grief. No wonder the first thing out of Martha's mouth when Jesus finally arrives is Verse 21, "*Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died!*" The words of Martha still echo through thousands of cemeteries even in our day. Is God ever late? In the light of eternity, probably not. Through the eyes of our grief, often so.

C.S. Lewis says in his book A Grief Observed, which was written out of the loss of his wife, "Go to God when you are happy and you will be welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face and a sound of bolting on the inside. After that, silence." Is God ever late?

Linda was one of the brightest young people in my Confirmation class that year. She was an excellent student, an eager learner, a bright personality that filled the whole room. During the course of confirmation her mother became ill, seriously ill. We prayed for her in class. We even held a healing service for her in the Chapel of the hospital. Linda especially prayed earnestly for her mother to get well. Instead, her mother died. While we tried to say words of hope at the funeral, the loss was just too much for that junior high girl. I never saw her again

in church. I don't know if she ever recovered her faith in God or not. Sometimes the silence of God is deafening. The most troubling part of this story is that Jesus waited. Is God ever late? In the light of eternity, no, in the depths of our grief, often.

JESUS WENT. Jesus is the one who goes. Verse 7 says that He said to His disciples, *“Let us go to him,”* but the disciples resist, saying to Him that you are dead meat back there. They tried to stone You the last time You were there and yet, You are going back?

Army Captain David Roselle lost his right foot when the Humvee in which he was riding hit an anti-tank mine in Iraq. Roselle was airlifted to a hospital in Germany and later to Walter Reed where he worked hard to walk again. After taking a leave to witness the birth of his son in Colorado, Captain David Roselle returned to his command post in Iraq to finish the job he had started. Other wounded military personnel have done the same. They are going back to finish the job they started.

The highest form of courage belongs to those who won't quit. Real courage means being perfectly aware of the worst that can happen, yet doing the right thing anyway.

Jesus went back to Jerusalem. In raising Lazarus from the grave, Jesus set in motion his own crucifixion and burial. *“So from that day on they plotted to take his life”* (Verse 53). When He set His face toward Jerusalem, He set His face toward the cross and death.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the 20th century pastor who gave his life resisting Adolph Hitler in Germany, opens his book on The Cost of Discipleship with these words, *“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”* I have been reading that book and that statement all of my ministry and sometimes I wonder, have we any concept of such costly Christianity? In our consumer-driven churches where people are encouraged to have their own way, is it any wonder that we are hiding such religious symbols as the cross? Does this abrasive symbol of capital punishment have any place in post modern Christianity? Is there still a cross in our religion?

Isaac Watts asked a long time ago?

Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease

While others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?

In Verse 16 we read, *Then Thomas, also called Didymus, said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go that we may die with him.”* Now whatever you want to say about doubting Thomas, whatever criticism you want to give him of his struggle to have his own faith, he shines with loyalty here. Let us go, even though following means certain death. When the temptation is to draw the shades, latch the windows, bolt the door, pull up the bed sheets, Thomas says, *“Let's follow.”* Is

your discipleship like that? Do you believe that much in your Christ? He went. He went to Jerusalem even though it set the stage for His crucifixion. Such is the nature of His courage.

JESUS WEPT. If you are my generation or beyond it, when you memorized scriptures you certainly knew this one, John 11:35. When you got stuck in quoting scriptures, you could always go to this one. It's the shortest one in the Bible. "*Jesus wept.*" Look at the two verses in front of it. "*When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled....Jesus wept.*"

Why did Jesus cry? Jesus weeps because he cares. As human beings we feel emotion. When someone is kind to us, we feel grateful. When something good happens, we experience joy. When someone betrays us, we feel anger; when a friend dies, we feel sorrow; when tragedy strikes, we are troubled. Being fully human, Jesus felt all those emotions. He understands; He cares.

Leo Buscaglia tells about a four year old child whose elderly neighbor had recently lost his wife. Seeing the man crying, the kid went over and climbed up in the old man's lap and sat there. Later the little boy's mother asked, "What did you say to Mr. Jones in his grief?" The kid replied, "Nothing, I just helped him cry." Some of the best things that we can do is to help our friends cry in their sorrow.

Every time a heart is broken, every time a grave is opened, every time a divorce happens, every time a child suffers, every time the pain comes, Jesus cries. He weeps because He cares.

Jesus weeps because he is concerned. He groans in spirit and is deeply troubled. Groan in Greek is embrimaomi and that translated means "indignation, to snort with anger like a horse, to rebuke sternly, to be painfully moved."

When buildings are bombed, and wars won't cease, when children are abused and tsunamis sweep over the innocent, Jesus weeps; his heart is touched with our grief.

St. Joseph Catholic Church sits directly across the street from the site of the Oklahoma City bombing. Less than a year after that tragic day, the church erected a statue of Jesus weeping. When terror strikes, when evil reigns, when the wrong has its day, Jesus weeps. Jesus is deeply troubled that death still has its grip on us.

JESUS WON. In Verse 43 we read, "*Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus come out!*" A stilled heart began to beat again, wrapped eyes popped open, wooden fingers began moving and a mummied man in a tomb sat up. The dead man came out. *Jesus said, "Take off his grave clothes and let him go" (verse 44).*

He speaks and listening to his voice, new life the dead receive. The mournful broken hearts rejoice; the humble poor believe. The most important thing I want you to get out of this sermon is this one sentence. If we give God time, he usually does something bigger than what we could have imagined making even fairy tales seem trite and boring.

This is the fifth Sunday of Lent, a day of searching our souls so let me ask you a question. What is the biggest fact of life for you at this moment? What is the real center of your universe? Some might respond: it is my home and family—that is a noble thing to say. Those of us wedded to our work will certainly say, my work, take that away and everything is gone. I used to say my health—as long as I have my health I am content. This is that one great thing I know today — Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life, those who believe in Christ will live, even though they die. And whosoever lives and believes in Christ will never die.

To believe that Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and Life is the doom of death.

G.K. Chesterton put it this way:

Though giant rains put out the sun,
Here stand I for a sign.
Though earth be filled with waters dark,
My cup is filled with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests that here
Under the deluge rod,
One nameless, tattered, broken man
Stood up and drank to God.

JESUS WON. To believe that Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life is the liberation of life. Believers are not in the land of the living on their way to the land of the dying. We are dwelling in the land of the dying on our way to the land of the living.

Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life. To cry it aloud when life is kind and tender and smiling and the birds are singing and the flowers are blooming is one thing. Even more important is to affirm it when the day is dark, gloom is thick, the grave is deep and the disease is deadly. To cry it then not weakly, but triumphantly, Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and Life, that is our hope; that is our faith. Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life. That is the Jesus I want to know. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

