

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: John 11:17-44

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus[Ⓐ] had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.[Ⓐ] Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,[Ⓐ] the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. ² Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! ³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. ⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; ⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

This is the word of the Lord... **Thanks be to God**

“Jesus Wept”

Of those children who have been sent home from Sunday School with the assignment to memorize their favorite scripture passages, you can almost always be sure that there will be somebody who will return having memorized John 11:35. Of course, that is because it’s the shortest verse in the Bible... “Jesus wept”. The newer translations have expanded it to “Jesus began to weep”, but it remains in many memories and many hearts the two simple words, “Jesus wept”.

Aside from having this claim to fame, this verse hidden within the story in John’s gospel of the raising of Lazarus are of EMORMOUS import. They are critically significant for the understanding of who Jesus is, the One who for our sake is eternally incarnated, crucified, and resurrected.¹ Let’s take a look at the whole story, and then consider this short little passage.

Jesus is in Galilee and he’s told by a messenger that his dear friend, Lazarus, is gravely ill in Bethany, outside of Jerusalem. The message comes as a plea for help, but scripture tell us that Jesus does not leave immediately. He lingers for 2 more days in Galilee before journeying with his disciples there. Jesus expresses confidence that Lazarus’ illness will not lead to death, but rather to the glory of God. Yet by the time he gets to the home of Mary & Martha, Lazarus is already dead and buried 4 days.

The sisters, Mary and Martha, are not only grief-stricken and anguished, but they are also obviously frustrated. Martha greets her friend, Jesus, with the words, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” In other words... “*Where were you, Jesus? How could you have let his happen?*” Her words are faithful ones, actually. They expect that God is good amid the presence of evil and suffering. Jesus answers her, “*Your brother will rise again*”. And shifting the focus away from her Jewish understanding of the resurrection of the dead at the end of history, he says his very famous words which refer to a more immediate truth. He says, “*I am the resurrection AND the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.*” And then, and then, just prior

¹Cindy Rigby. “Atonement” in *Insights* (Austin: Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2000), 16.

to his summoning the powers of God within him, just prior to calling Lazarus from the grave, bringing a dead man to walk again, Scripture says that Jesus wept.

Jesus wept. Two simple words. Why does Jesus weep? He knows that soon he will bring Lazarus back to life. Why does he weep? Well.....there is much speculation about this, but it is fairly universally agreed that his tears are tears of grief. I cannot help but think that Jesus weeps tears for his friends, Martha and Mary in their grief; and he sheds his own tears over the loss of his friend Lazarus. We cannot forget that Jesus, was fully divine, but also fully human, and he had human relationships throughout his life. And not always were these relationships in the leader-follower dynamic. He had friends as do we, people whom he shared stories with and recognized common interests, shared vulnerabilities and joys, people with whom he sat around the table, eating and laughing. He had friends whom he loved. It hurt to know that Lazarus experienced the sting of death, a suffering that will never be erased any more than Job's suffering was erased when he was restored to health and given a new family.² It hurt to see Mary clinging to him in despair, not able to apprehend hope in the presence of God.

Yes, Jesus weeps over the suffering of his friends, but he also grieves the frailty of life, the awful randomness by which life is often snuffed out. And he cries, he sheds tears, over the brokenness, the sinfulness, the pain of the world. He weeps because soon he will die at the hands of the very people whom he came to be with...the people he came to save. In fact, Rev. Kimberly Knight speculates that perhaps this is the true miracle of the Lazarus story, that God took into God's very self the depth of our suffering in a new way...and wept.³ Yes, Jesus weeps over the brokenness of the world.

But yet, it is into THIS world that Jesus inserted himself. He inserted himself into the messiness, which is humanity and the human condition. Jesus CAME to be in complete solidarity with humankind, the good and bad. He identified with us in the highest possible degree...and he did it with com--passion. In German, I understand the word compassion is

² Kimberly Knight. "Lazarus and the Miracle of a Weeping God." <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/kimberlyknight/2013/07/lazarus-and-the-miracle-of-weeping/>. (accessed 3-23-23).

³ Kimberly Knight.

mitleid (mitlightht) which means “with suffering”. Jesus identified with us through/with suffering, not “over” suffering, but “through/with” suffering.⁴

A theologian who has had enormous impact on how Christians think about this subject was Jurgen Moltmann. As a young soldier in the Germany army in WWII he witnessed 40,000 civilian casualties with the bombing of his hometown of Hamburg, and then when he was taken as a POW by the British he came to see the horrible atrocities committed against the Jews by his own people. He began to wrestle with serious questions like, “*Who is God and Where is God in all this?*” After much study, he came to understand that foundational to the CHARACTER of our God is that God in Christ enters fully into human suffering, into our loneliness and sense of abandonment, our fear and pain, and he weeps not just for us but with us, beside us, all of us. Moltmann concluded that “*God is not more divine than he is in this HUMANITY.*”³ I think how this all translates to US, is that there is no sadness that is too great, no place too deep or far away, no pain or sorrow too great that we are not with Jesus and he with us. We do not walk this life...broken as it is...by ourselves! As Moltmann says, “*God weeps with us so that we may one day laugh with him.*”⁵

There is a story that I sometimes tell in our children’s time. While very simple, it is worth all of us giving thought to. A child had a stomachache and was unable to sleep because of it. The grandmother went into her bedroom and pulled her up into her lap. She stroked her belly and gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. As the child looked into her grandmother’s face, she saw the grandmother blinking back sympathetic tears. Then all became well for the girl. Did the rubbing of the belly and the kiss really make it well? What do you think? No. It was the time in her arms, curled up in her lap, seeing her cry and when asked, hearing her answer, “I am crying because when you hurt, I hurt.” That did more for the child than all the medicine in the world.

Yes, friends, here in this the shortest verse of the Bible, our Lord shows us that he has not come to simply stick his big toe in the pool. No, Jesus has come to swim in the deep end with

⁴KC Ptomey. Sermon: “What’s Passion Got to do With It?” <http://www.fpcnyc.org/media/sermons-pdf/2009/090405.pdf>. (accessed 4-8-17).

⁵Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 205

us. In solidarity with us, he is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. It is not the gospel to pretend that evil is not evil...to pretend that tornadoes and storms and earthquakes don't claim their victims, that airliners full of passengers don't crash, that a dictator doesn't invade and decimate a neighboring country, that children aren't kidnapped and forced into slavery, that millions of people are starving in a world that has food to feed them, or refugees by the millions do not have a place to call home. It is not the gospel to pretend that innocent soldiers on their own homebase are victimized, that so many young lives are wasted due to drug addiction, or that a beloved brother, sister, mother, father, husband or wife does not suddenly die. No, Jesus shows us that it is not the gospel to deny the presence of evil and suffering, but instead, it is the gospel to recognize that when our hearts break, God's heart breaks too. Jesus still weeps with us. He shares all our sorrows, shoulders our burdens, and he agonizes with us in our human sufferings. Our holy companion has been there and is there. He has walked our journey, every step of the way, even unto death....All the way and beyond.⁶ (*Pause*)

So brothers and sisters, no fear. No worries for he is *the resurrection AND the life. Those who believe in him, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in him will never die.*” Amen.

⁶ Kimberly Knight.