
Death of Lazarus

A sermon by CanonCarolynne Williams

Romans 8:6-11

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Mary and Martha were sisters. They had a brother named Lazarus. These siblings lived in a town called Bethany. Bethany was near the city of Jerusalem. The three of them were siblings as well as friends to each other. And were friends with Jesus. Our scripture lesson tells us Jesus would often visit with them when he was in Bethany. Jesus loved Lazarus.

One evening, Lazarus became very sick. He was very ill. His sisters, Mary and Martha were frantic. They did what any of us would so if we had a close friend we could call upon in our time of need, who became very ill.

Their close friend was Jesus and they reached out to him. When Jesus heard the news about the illness of Lazarus, he did not go to him immediately. Rather, he waited four days before going to Bethany.

Four days!

When Jesus arrived in Bethany and went to the home of Lazarus, he had been dead four days. Because of his death, other friends were gathered. They were gathered to remember, to share joys about Lazarus and to be together at this time of loss. They were doing what friends do when a loved one has died.

When Jesus arrived, Martha went out to talk with Jesus. She wanted to know why it had taken him so long to come to the side of Lazarus. She said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again. "I am the Resurrection and I am life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who believes in me will never die."

Do you believe this? Perhaps.

Christians often believe this. We as a Christian community believe that life does not end with death.

There are two distinct responses to Jesus in this passage. Belief and conflict. This passage tells reminds us that we are often like the Jews and the Pharisees. There are those who believe and there are those who are not sure, like Thomas. The Pharisees worry that Jesus' presence is a threat to the nations. They confer about how they may put him to death. Others choose to NOT believe. The gospel words telling the story of the death of Lazarus and the restoration of his life, is to tell the hearer about not only the power of God through Jesus, but also about the power of him to give NEW Life. (John Van Harn, *Lectionary Commentary*, pp. 533-536)

We are comforted throughout scripture with the words of God which provide hope and promise. There is a difference between believing in the power of God and being in church all of the time, but yet are not sure, about the power of God. One action does not ensure the embracing of the other action. Some of us are not convinced about the omnipotence in the incarnation of our Lord. In order to begin understanding one is encouraged to walk by faith, not by sight. We were created to have an intimate relationship with God. Our very "being", is dependent upon the spirit of the Lord. The hunger and

thirst that we carry in our very souls is satisfied only with understanding and receiving the message of hope to believe in the promise of God. In death life is not ended, but changed.

As we have lived each day through another season of Lent and as we approach Palm Sunday, we are encouraged to seek a stronger and porous God. The distractions and desires of our own will continue to permeate our inner consciousness, however, with that volleying and awareness we move closer to the comfort and glory of God. We are Easter people and in seeking the continued glory of God, we must recognize the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. This means reacting the voices of Palm Sunday of the people of long ago who were a part of the crowd.

The crowd next Sunday, Palm Sunday, will represent all that we are in our humanness.

We are to remember today as well as moving forward that Easter will come for all of us. But not without this week. We often like to acknowledge the elements of Holy Week with a wink and a nod, but true life and living says, like Lazarus, we too must see with a clear eye and a calm spirit, the true face of God.

As we seek the face of God, we will see him in others. We will see the face of God in those who are difficult to love, we will see the face of God in those of whom we strongly disagree, or don't acknowledge. The beauty is through life's valleys' and triumphs, we are loved and cared for by a compassionate God. In building relationship with God, we are taught to "number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom." The raising of Lazarus, signifies that God's eschatological promises are here and now, already being realized amid and despite the ordinariness of the course of life, which includes illnesses, deaths and burials like those of Lazarus. This and other such signs, point to Jesus, the sign maker, who in turn by his attitude of prayer points to God. His oneness with God is transparent. His life giving action is not dependent on human faith whether that of Mary or Martha, Lazarus or the on lookers, but calls it forth. For Thomas, seeing Christ crucified, yet risen, evokes faith. Faith then is not based on seeing. It is based on truth.

As we move forward, always reflecting, a new day is upon us. This day is new. Let us examine the spiritual condition of our heart. Are our hearts turned toward God? Is my heart hardened and not willing to be open to a new way of being? God says, "let not your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me."

Seeking newness and refreshment from our heart can be life changing and life giving. The possibility is always before us with the unconditional love from God. Amen.