

Lent 5**Text: John 11****Theme: A Revelation of God's Compassion and Power**

In this series of Gospel lessons for Lent, we have meant some fascinating characters in John's Gospel. It began with Nicodemus, the man who came to Jesus at night in John 3. He came to believe in Jesus after watching Him die on the cross. Then we had the story of the woman at the well in John 4. She and her whole village came to believe in Jesus. Last week we had the story of the man whom Jesus healed who had been blind from birth. He confessed his faith in Jesus and worshipped Him. Today we have the story of Lazarus, a dear friend of Jesus, who died, but Jesus raised him from the dead, and many people came to believe in Jesus. In all of these stories God was glorified and people came to faith in Jesus.

I. At first it seemed like Jesus should have done something.

We see that question from all of the people in the text. Jesus got word that Lazarus was gravely ill. You would think that He would have gone to Jerusalem as fast as He could. Instead he stayed where He was for two more days. His disciples thought that He stayed in order to save His own life. When He did decide to go, they warned Him against it because the Jews had just tried to kill Him there. When He knew that Lazarus had died, Jesus left. By the time that He arrived Lazarus had already been dead for 4 days. His sister Martha came out to meet Jesus and said, "*If you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" It seemed like Jesus arrived too late to do anything. Even some of the people who had comforted the sisters said, "*Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?*"

To be honest, we have all had those thoughts about Jesus in our lives. Tragedy strikes, and we ask, "Where are you Lord?" We pray for help, and it seems like there is no answer. We feel like David in Psalm 55, "*Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught.*" It gets to the point of how the psalm felt in Psalm 10, "*Why, O Lord, do you stand far off: Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*" David even wrote in Psalm 13, "*Who long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?*" We have all had those times when we lived in fear, trouble, guilt or mourning, and God seemed to be so far away. For many people the last few weeks have seemed like that as they have lost jobs, been confined to small quarters or dealt with the fear of the Corona Virus.

In all these instances it seemed like God was missing two things – compassion and power. It almost seemed as though Jesus didn't care about Lazarus. He didn't come right away when His friend was in need. Then when He arrived, it didn't seem like He was able to do anything. He stood there weeping. In such times we can also begin to wonder whether God really does care for us and whether He is able to help us. That is the crux of this story and even of our lives.

II. The Good News is that God does care for us, and He is able to rescue us.

That is evident from this story. Jesus' miracles began with something very simple. He changed water into wine. This was the greatest of them all. He raised a man from the dead, who had been in the grave for 4 days. Jesus did care. That was shown most emphatically when He wept at the

tomb of His dear friend. But He did not stand there weeping as if He had no hope. He told the people, who were standing there to remove the stone. He prayed and then called out in a loud voice *“Lazarus, come out!”* The dead man rose and walked out of the grave. As Jesus said, this was for God’s glory that God’s Son would have been glorified from it. There is no other miracle in which both the compassion and power of God are revealed as in this story.

Jesus would be glorified through the cross. John’s Gospel often called Jesus’ crucifixion the hour of His glorification. (12:23ff) Jesus suffered horribly on the cross. He suffered tremendous pain. He was mocked and ridiculed by almost everyone. He was tempted again and again to come down. He had the punishment of all of the sins of the world on His back. He was even forsaken by His Heavenly Father. On that cross we see the compassion of God more than anyplace. Jesus thought of those who were crucifying Him and prayed for His forgiveness. He cared for His mother by giving her into John’s care. He even remembered the thief who was crucified with Him by promising Him paradise. But His compassion was especially shown in that while He was tempted to come down, He stayed on that cross because He loved us so much. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. His power was shown when He was able to shout in victory, “It is finished,” as He was dying. The curtain at the temple that separated the Holy of Holies was also torn in two to show that there was now peace with God and there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That victory was declared when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the right Hand of the Father where He intercedes for us. Christ was glorified on that old rugged cross as He suffered and died to take away all of our sins and win for us the gift of everlasting life. It was after that event that the first character of this series, Nicodemus, came to faith in Christ as His Savior.

God cares for us and will deliver us from every evil. Do you remember those three Psalms that I quoted earlier? God came to the aid of His people and rescued them. Each one of those psalms ends with a call to trust in the Lord David writes in Psalm 55, *“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall.”* (Ps 55:22) Psalm 10 ends, *“You hear, O Lord the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.”* But 13 ends, *“But I trust in Your unfailing love; my heart rejoiced in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me.”* God teaches us through times of trial, sins, and even death, that we can always look to Him. We realize that He will never leave us or forsake us. We find peace that He forgives all of our sins. In our hour of grief, He gives us the sure hope of eternal life. He is glorified by showing without a doubt that He will never leave or forsake His people.

That is still true in this great crisis that has engulfed our country and the entire world. The fear, panic, and suffering, that are so prevalent are nothing new. But in such times God’s people have stood firm in faith and confidence. When horrible plagues ravaged the Roman empire, killing the majority of the people in places, Christians cared for the sick and even established the first hospitals. In the Middle Ages the plague would go through Europe, killing dozens of people in a town a day. Some of our greatest Lutheran hymns of trust in God came from this period, such as from Philipp Nicolai who wrote “How Lovely Shines the Morning Star”, Martin Rinkardt who wrote “Now Thank We All our God,” and Paul Gerhardt’s many hymns. God was glorified by His grace and mercy in the past in times of need. His mercy is still sure in our day too. Like Martha,

may we respond with such faith when she said, “*Yes, Lord I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world.*” It is such faith that will save us amidst the evils of our day and glorify our Heavenly Father who saves us.

Amen.

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Prayer of the Church

Almighty God, everlasting Father, You saw Israel in their despair and raised them up to hope by placing Your Spirit upon them. Join us together with the communion of saints in Christ, even though we must for a time stand apart. Raise us up from our weariness and grant us Your Spirit, that we may be strong in faith, bold in witness, holy in life and steadfast in hope. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O eternal Lord, Your Son has given us the new birth of water and the Word and planted faith in us, that we might be Your own children. Bless Your Church. Supply her with able, fearless and caring pastors to nurture us in Your Word. Fill your people with wisdom that the Gospel will continue to spread beyond our church walls in new and innovative ways. Keep Your Church in Your mercy, that she may believe without fear and love without limit. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God of power and might, You hold in Your hand all the might of man. Give wisdom to our government officials at this time as they make important decisions that will affect us all. Bless and defend us against all destruction, especially from this pandemic, and teach us to be patient and faithful citizens of this land, using ourselves and our resources wisely for the good of all. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O merciful Lord, Your Son shed tears for Lazarus, whom He loved. Grant Your compassion, patience and endurance to all who suffer illness, who are troubled in mind or whose time on earth is short. Give comfort to the grieving and peace to the dying. Hear all our prayers, especially on behalf of _____ and for all those we name in our hearts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O gracious God, You daily and richly grant us all things we need for this body and life. Bless our labors, and grant us wisdom to use the fruits of those labors wisely and well, for the care of our families, for the poor in their needs, and for the support of Your work in this congregation. Preserve us from fear and greed as we live and work alone, and turn us instead in love toward our neighbors however distant. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.