

## The Fifth Sunday in Lent

### Text: John 11:1 - 45 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." <sup>4</sup>When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup>Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup>Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. <sup>7</sup>Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." <sup>8</sup>"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" <sup>9</sup>Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. <sup>10</sup>It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." <sup>11</sup>After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." <sup>12</sup>His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." <sup>13</sup>Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. <sup>14</sup>So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup>and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup>Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." <sup>17</sup>On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup>Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup>and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup>Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; <sup>26</sup>and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." <sup>28</sup>And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." <sup>29</sup>When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. <sup>32</sup>When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup>"Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. <sup>35</sup>Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup>Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup>Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup>"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." <sup>40</sup>Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." <sup>45</sup>Therefore

many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

### ***He Is the Resurrection and the Life***

When I first saw the readings for this Sunday, I thought that they just don't fit. They are Easter readings, and we are still in the season of Lent. In fact, today's Old Testament lesson is the traditional lesson for Easter morning. I do think that these lessons jump the gun a little bit for Easter, but they sure fit this week. This week I witnessed the passing of two of our long-time members. I saw the grief of their families and loved ones, and I felt it myself. Today it is fitting for us as a congregation to hear Jesus' words, "I am the resurrection and the life."

#### I. Death brings great sorrow.

We are often left wondering, "Why?" Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus in Galilee that Lazarus was very sick. They called Lazarus, "The one you love." There must have been a strong friendship between the two of them. We know that when Jesus would go to Jerusalem, He would spend time at their home. (Luke 10) It was only two miles from the city. Generally when we hear about such an illness, we leave right away, but Jesus stayed where He was for two more days. By the time that He got to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days.

When He arrived, Martha came running to meet Him. She told the Lord, "*If You had been here, my brother would not have died.*" She wondered, "Why?" Why didn't Jesus come right away? Why did He have to wait so long? How could He allow His good friend to die and his sisters to grieve so much?

Don't we find ourselves asking those same questions? If only this or that would have happened? If God really loves us, why would He allow us to grieve like this? There must be something that God could have done to stop this.

When death comes, we are filled with grief. It says that many people had come to comfort Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother. This was a very tragic loss. Martha ran out to meet the Lord as soon as He came with those words, "If you had been here..." Then Mary went to the Lord. She fell at His feet, sobbing, and cried out, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" They were weeping and those with them were weeping.

As Christians we also weep and mourn. The Bible never says that death is something that we celebrate. It is never our friend. It is always our enemy. Christians grieve, but as 1 Thess. 4:13 says, "*We do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.*" There is nothing wrong with grieving at the loss of a loved one. It is the greatest loss that we ever experience in this life, and something that scars us as long as we live.

Jesus shares that grief with us. When Jesus saw Mary weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Then He also began to weep. It was not the loss of Lazarus that made Jesus cry. He knew from the beginning that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. The grief and sorrow of Mary and Martha is what caused Him to weep. Their grief touched His heart.

Our grief touches his heart too. As it says in Isaiah 53, “*Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows.*” He sympathizes with us in every time of grief and need. In his hymn “Rejoice My Heart Be Glad and Sing,” Paul Gerhardt writes,

**He knows how oft a Christian weeps  
And why his tears now fall;  
And in the book His mercy keeps  
These things are noted all.** (vs 11)

Christ not only knows our grief. He feels it too.

II. In His mercy He gives us victory over death.

He conquered death that day in Bethany. It says in verse 38 that Jesus was deeply moved again when He came to the tomb. He knew what He was about to do. Yet, the grief around Him moved Him greatly. Then He told them to move the stone away. It appears as if Lazarus’ family thought that He just wanted to see His friend one last time. They told Him that after four days there would be a bad odor. But the Lord had them remove the stone. He prayed to His Father. Then He called out in a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come out!*” To everyone’s astonishment, Lazarus walked out of the grave still wearing all of the burial cloths. In an instant the weeping and sorrow of all of those people turned into the greatest joy that they had ever experienced. Jesus could have hurried to Bethany to heal Lazarus before he died, but His waiting allowed Him to also experience our grief, it made the joy of Mary and Martha even sweeter, and this great miracle caused many people to put their faith in Him.

Christ wants to give us peace and hope in our grief too. When Jesus first arrived, He told Mary, “*Your brother will rise again.*” She answered, “*I know that He will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*” Then Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.*”

Those are the words of comfort that the Scriptures also give to us. As I said earlier, 1 Thessalonians 4 says that we do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. Then it gives the reason, “*We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.*” In 1 Corinthians 15:20 Paul writes, “*Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*”

Our Christian hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Paul writes that He was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification. (Rm 4:25) When He died, He paid for all of our sins. When He rose, it assured us of our eternal life. His death and resurrection for us, offers peace and hope. It assures us that the souls of those who have died in the Lord are now with Him in His glory in heaven and that their bodies will also rise to eternal life on the last day. It also assures us that when our last hour comes, we can leave this world in peace, knowing that Christ promises us everlasting life with Him in His glory.

It is faith in Christ that gives us that victory. Jesus asked Martha, “Do you believe this?” She answered, “*Yes, Lord I believe that You are the Christ, the son of God, who was to come into the world.*” It was that confession of faith that gave Martha comfort even before her brother was raised

from the dead.

It is that confession of faith that comforts us in our grief. A lot of people will say that their loved one is in a better place or that it is good that their suffering has now ended. They speak of a wish for eternal life. But as Christians we really have hope which is based in Christ. We look to Christ, the One who was able to heal the sick and raise the dead. We look to Christ who promises that He is going to prepare a place for us that we may be where He is. We look to Christ who died and rose for us. Faith in Him makes us feel good that our loved ones who have died in the Lord are safe in His arms. He promises in John 10, *“My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”* That confession, “Yes, Lord, I believe,” takes away our sorrow and fills our hearts with hope and peace.

There is a well-known story about Martin Luther at the death of his 14 year old daughter Magdalena. He said to his friend Philip Melancton, "When that child should come to life again and bring me the whole Turkish empire, I wouldn't want it. Whoever dies as she did, dies a blessed death. Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord". Just before she died, he asked her, "Magdalena, my dear little daughter, would you like to stay here with your father, or would you willingly go to your Father yonder? She answered, "Dear father, as God wills." It was her faith in Christ and his faith in Christ that gave Luther comfort and peace at that devastating time. May God grant each of us such faith, that we may find hope in the midst of our grief that Christ is the resurrection and the life.

Amen

***Pastor Don Hougard  
Benediction Lutheran Church  
Milwaukee, WI  
March 8, 2008***