

Lent
April 2, 2017
My Brother Would Not Have Died
Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45
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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Gracia y paz de dios el Padre, Hijo y Espiritu Santo.
Grace and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died! Jesus, this is personal! Where were you?

It has been a difficult start to 2017. Fourteen of us have experienced the death of someone we love .
grandmother, father, mother, son, niece, father-in-law, brother.

I knew my brother was dying and it still pierced my heart when my niece called to tell me his battle against bladder cancer was over. Why did this happen? He was only 76! What could have been done to prevent this, or at least prolong his life? Maybe you asked a similar question when your loved one died? "If only the doctors had found the cancer sooner."

"Lord, if you had been here our brother would not have died".

The story of Lazarus and Martha and Mary raises sooo many questions. Why did Jesus dawdle, why didn't he rush to his friend's side? What is this nonsense about twelve hours of daylight and darkness? If Lazarus is only sleeping, why go at all and risk being stoned by the Jews? Why are you using poor Lazarus as a pawn to get your point across? Several of my text study colleagues accused Jesus of being a jerk, playing with the trust and love of his friends to prove his point.

The story of Lazarus cannot stand in isolation from the rest of the gospel according to John, nor from the rest of scripture.

These past weeks we have heard compelling stories about Jesus' encounters with a variety of believers, doubters and those who are plotting to kill him.

Nicodemus, the prominent religious leader, comes to Jesus by night, believing that Jesus is sent from above. Nicodemus leaves confused by what Jesus has told him. Jesus crosses social, religious and political boundaries at the well in Sychar when he speaks to a Samaritan woman in the middle of the day. Jesus breaks the Sabbath work rules when he heals the man born blind. We watch the man grow in faith and those around him decrease in faith. Today we witness another example of Jesus' mission to reveal God as the one who sent Jesus to be the light of the world.

Nicodemus came alone to Jesus. The Samaritan women brought the whole town out to the well to meet Jesus. The man born blind stirred up a ruckus among his neighbors, the religious community and the disciples. Raising Lazarus from death is the last straw for those religious authorities. Immediately following this event, some of those who observed it "went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done". The chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting and began to plot how to kill Jesus.

We are near the end of the road with Jesus. Everything we have heard these past weeks is leading us to the cross. Today, we SEE, not just hear, how Jesus will be glorified by God. Today's text, along with the other Lenten gospels we have heard have been used for centuries by the church as preparation for those about to be baptized.

Baptism is the new birth from above as Jesus told Nicodemus. Baptism involves the living water Jesus offered the woman at the well. Baptism is the washing that enables us to see Jesus like the man born blind. Baptism is resurrection to new life. Jesus calls us by name, out of the tomb of sin and darkness into the glorious light of the great "I AM" unbound and set free to walk in the light, not stumble in the darkness. Baptism is Jesus saying, in a loud voice "I love you!" Baptism is resurrection! Resurrection is not something that happens only after death, as Martha believed. Eternal life something out there in our future. Both are present in Jesus Christ, available right now to whoever believes in Jesus.

Think about it, . my brother, my sister, my mom, my dad, my aunts and uncles, your cousins, your friends and family who have "fallen asleep" are living in eternity right now! So are we! Right now! Resurrection and eternal life are present, right now!

The hope that Jesus offers is not just life after death, it is a spiritual resurrection, right now! The key word in all of these Lenten stories, in all of the fourth gospel, is "BELIEVE".

We hear Jesus say "those who believe in me" "everyone who lives and believes in me" "Do you believe this?" We have the same struggles as these people we have met: Nicodemus struggled to believe in Jesus. His question: "how can this be?" shows the same doubt that afflicts us.

The woman at the well led others to believe Even as she questioned her encounter with Jesus saying, "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" We are like the man born blind, shifting from not knowing Jesus to confessing "Yes, Lord, I believe". Today we get a sneak preview of what is to come for Jesus, . a physical resurrection that will cause many to believe. The gospel of John is about seeing God's glory in Jesus. The one who is the resurrection and the light. And it is about inviting others to "come and see" the glory of God, the love of God, the compassion and the grace of God.

Jesus, if you had been here my brother would not have died. Like Nicodemus my own brother walked away in doubt and uncertainty from the community of believers. Yet, God called him by name at his baptism, claimed him and marked him with the cross of Christ forever. My brother is not dead! He lives! In the midst of sadness and grief we confess: Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the resurrection and the life.

Thanks be to God!