

"Jesus Is Always with US" - St. John 11:1-45

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The text for meditation for this morning is from the Gospel of John 11:1-45, which I read before. Let us pray: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen

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Brothers and sisters in Christ, allow me to start this meditation with the following questions. Did God hear our prayers? Did God care about us? Is God there sometimes and sometimes not? To answer these questions, let's go back to the time when Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior, walked this earth. During His life, Jesus saw crowds come and go. Some followed some did not. Some were friendly some were not. But, there were three friends, a brother and two sisters, who lived in the Jerusalem suburb of Bethany. It seems that Jesus could stop by with His disciples in town, just about any time He wanted. He could come unannounced. He could stay as long as He wanted. No matter what the situation or circumstance, He was welcomed.

Although most of us have many acquaintances, we can count ourselves blessed if we have one or two friends who are truly glad to see us come as we are; who are willing to listen to our complaints and sorrows; who are ready to stand by us no matter what. This seemed to be the kind of relationship that Jesus shared with the trio of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary; siblings who welcomed the Lord into their home on several occasions. All seemed good; all seemed to be blessed until the day that Lazarus got sick, and each day, he was getting worse.

When we run out of hopes and cures, and the shadow of death looms large, the word goes out to family and friends. "Your friend, your father, mother, sister, brother, beloved is dying. It's time to come." Then, with nothing more to be done, we wait as the passing procession of the loving and the helpless pass by to say their goodbyes. Perhaps it was that way for Mary and Martha. They sent for Jesus. Their message was simple: "Lord, the one you love is sick." Their words sound like ours: "The doctors can do no more. It's time to come." That's what we say. It's what Mary and Martha said to Jesus. They wanted Him to come. Perhaps He would only come to offer His respects.

But, the sisters hoped for something more. They had heard, perhaps even seen, the miraculous things Jesus had done for others; how He had healed the blind, the lame, the deaf, those who had devils and diseases. "Even though the doctors are helpless," they thought to themselves, "Jesus can make a difference." But, Jesus did not come right away. The Bible

says He remained where He was for two more days, and then He returned when his friend had died. His delayed arrival was announced among the mournful tones to the sisters: "Jesus is coming." Martha went to greet Him. Mary stayed where she was. Martha came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

So here is the question of the day: "When did God most bless the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha? Was God closer when everyone was healthy, but farther away when one of them was sick? Was He nearer when Jesus came to their home as a welcome Friend but farther away when He arrived too late for a healing? Did Jesus care for them more when everybody sat around the table, laughing and eating and there were no problems? Did He care for them less when there were tears and sorrow? That is a tough question. Deep down, most people believe that God is close to them during the good times, but far away in the bad. We may not thank Him when life is treating us well, but we get very angry at Him when difficulties come. We want to know, "Lord, why have you stopped caring?"

What do people say when they are in the hospital suffering from something serious? What do married couples say when the vows "till death us do part" have turned to vinegar on their tongues? We've seen the pain of children, the loneliness of teens, the isolation of the elderly. So many of these people, people like us, people who are us, want to know, demand to know, "God, where are You? Why have You deserted me?"

In our Sunday service we pray for members who are sick or going through difficult times, and we give thanks to God for having delivered people from surgery, accident, or illness. It is good and right that we do so. But what does that say to the families of those people who didn't get well or died? Did God stop caring for those families? The idea of God being near us in times of blessing and distant in times of trouble is nothing new.

After Jesus had lived His life for us; after He had been tried, convicted, and crucified for us; after He had risen from the dead; after He had ascended into heaven, His disciples, by the power of the Holy Spirit, began to preach the Good News of the risen Savior to a lost humanity. One of them, Peter, was arrested for his preaching. The ruler who had the apostle jailed had every intention of putting Peter to death. By Divine intervention, through the assistance of a heaven-sent angel, Peter was released from prison and continued in the Lord's ministry. The people rejoiced at God's deliverance. The Lord was with Peter.

But, years later when Peter was in Rome and condemned to die, and no angel came to provide a miraculous escape, did people wonder if God had somehow forgotten and forsaken him? Do not ever believe such foolishness. We may act that way, but God does not! God is not a fair-weather friend.

So, let's go back to Bethany, to Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus was already dead and buried. The sisters were in mourning. One of the sister went out to meet Him said, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." But then with a great show of faith, she added, "Even now, I know God will give you what you ask." Martha knew something we often forget: "God is with us no matter the situation, no matter the circumstance."

To Martha's confession Jesus replied, "Your brother will rise again." This was not news to Martha. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, all who have, in repentance and by the Spirit's power, been lead to call Him Savior, will rise again to life. Nothing in all creation, not even death, can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus. Martha knew that and agreed: "On the last day, on the last judgment, my brother will rise." Then Jesus says, "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. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

Jesus was asking if Martha believed that He was her Savior, her brother's Savior, her sister's Savior, the world's Savior. He was asking if she believed that He is Lord and Savior in life and in death, in good times and in bad, in happy times and in sad. That He is always Savior, Redeemer, Lord and God, for us and for our salvation. Martha humbly confessed as the whole Christian Church confesses, "Yes, Lord." It didn't take long before they were all standing at Lazarus' tomb. Jesus wept. And some people said, "See how He loved Lazarus." "But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" And, there it is, that idea that when bad times come, God can't be found. That idea that if evil is present, God must be absent. Then Jesus had the stone rolled from the tomb and called into the chamber of death, "Lazarus, come out." That call was a challenge to death; a challenge that death lost. A living Lazarus, still bound in his grave clothes, came shuffling to the mouth of the tomb.

The dead had been restored to life; the family was reunited; the mourners were impressed; the religious leaders were scared. It had been a most amazing day. After this miracle, the Jewish leaders began plotting to kill Jesus and Lazarus. They wanted to stuff this living, walking, talking, breathing proof of Jesus' Messiahship back into his grave. Even so, God was close to Martha, Mary, and Lazarus that day. The prayers of the sisters had been answered.

God did not desert them nor does He desert us. God's love was there when Lazarus was healthy; God's love was there when Lazarus was ill. God's love remained when Lazarus died. God's love was there when lonely sisters went into mourning and God's love was there when Jesus cried outside of His friend's grave. God's love was there when the stone was rolled away; and it was there when Lazarus rose. God's love was there when Jesus was arrested,

and it was certainly there on the cross when He died for you and me. It was there when the Savior rose from the dead, and it was there when one-by-one Mary, Martha, and Lazarus died; it was there when the disciples were martyred. And, that love is still there for us, for you and me.

God, with His grace, does not move. If He seems far away, it is not because He is out taking a stroll; it is because you may not be able to see Him clearly, or your mind may not be able to grasp His presence. But He is there! The heavenly Father who sent His Son to die and rise to save you will not leave you. Jesus is there, wishing to assist, wanting to strengthen, calling you to cast your cares upon Him, because He cares for you.

This is the promise of the Gospel; that God is with us, working on us and for us. There is always something that is trying to drive a wedge between you and God. When marriage, and family, and life, and health are all the pits, Jesus is with you. When you celebrate a marriage anniversary all alone, Jesus is with you. When there is a job loss, a setback, a lifestyle change, Jesus is with you. Even when a little loved one makes it to heaven before they make it to first grade, Jesus is with you. If you have reluctantly become an expert on an illness; if you lost a loved one to a tragedy, Jesus remains.

This is Jesus, the Savior who takes you through pain to peace; who substitutes heaven for hell, hope for despair. This is the Savior who came to the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus with hope, with healing, with life, with resurrection. He is the One who comes to us, even now, even here, in this church, surrounded by tress, with healing and life in His Word and Sacrament. He comes to you. Jesus for you, with a taste of Easter even when life is in Lent. I know that my Redeemer lives. Amen.

“The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour”. Amen