

Lent 5 – March 29, 2020

Text: John 11:1-16

Theme: Wait 'til he's good and dead

Have you ever noticed that God rarely works according to our timeline or our plan? We know that worry is huge waste of time and energy, but we worry anyway. Why is that? If you are a child of God, you know that he will turn all things for our good so why worry? Whatever we have to endure will be for our good, but we worry because we full well know that, while everything will be for our good, God may not agree with what we think is good. Worry is a sin. All worry is a violation of the 1st Commandment. "You shall have no other gods." When we worry, we are putting what we want before God or we are showing our belief that someone or something else has more power than God. Worry may well be our biggest idol and we make sacrifices to our idol every time we spend energy or time worrying about anything.

People try to justify their worry like we always try to justify the sacrifices we make to our idols. "Oh, I'm not worried, I'm just concerned." No, concern is when you try to figure out what you can do to serve God or help others. Concern is when you study the Scriptures to try to determine God's will for you. Real concern is when we strive to know God's will in the face of hardship, challenge and crisis. We know that God will see to it that

everything will work for our good when we are following his will and he reveals his will readily in the Scriptures. We just don't always like it, and we try to impose our desires upon him.

The story of Lazarus is a classic example of people failing to seek God's will and instead trying to demand that God act according to their will. Jesus and the disciples get word that Lazarus is ill. Does Jesus rush out the door and hurry to the side of his friend? Nope, he hangs around for a couple more days until Lazarus is good and dead. Then he goes! You can imagine his disciples' frustrations! First he took his time when he heard that he was ill and then he announced that he was dead and *NOW* they are going into Bethany where the Jews were just recently seeking to stone him to death, by the way. What is the point of that?

Jesus tells them. He waited for Lazarus to die so that they and all others could see that death has no mastery over Jesus. They were all focused on saving Lazarus' life but that was of no concern to Jesus. Jesus knows that he has all mastery over death, and that all these people and we need to see that God has everything under control and does not need our help. All we are called to do is what he has called us to do. Serve him by worshipping him, seeking to serve others and showing his love, mercy and justice to the world around us.

Last week we saw that Jesus can reverse blindness. This week, he reverses even death. But he does what he does when and where it pleases him not when it is convenient for us or when we organize enough people to ask him for it. That is not to say that Jesus is capricious. He isn't a whimsical god playing chess with our lives, but he is also unmoved by our demands for him to hurry up and fix it our way!

One thing most Christians have seen is that our faith grows best under pressure. Now, no one like the pressure. It is uncomfortable facing situations in which we cannot clearly see the outcome. But like pressure is necessary for a lump of coal to become a diamond, so is pressure necessary for faith to flourish. Our job is to feed our faith with Word and Sacrament while we endure the pressure, knowing that God always does amazing things, like reverse blindness or even death. That is why we are continuing to worship here in the midst of the COVID19 crisis. I believe that Word and Sacrament are the most essential services we have. I don't care if we run out of toilet paper. If I do, I have plenty of junk mail stockpiled in my recycle bin. But we cannot simply shut down the supply of God's Word and Sacrament. Different pastors make different decisions and I judge no one because none of us were trained for ministry in the midst of a

pandemic. It's not in the Practical Theology textbooks. But I have to be true to what I believe and I believe that the proclamation of the Word of God is absolutely essential in every circumstance and that his holy Body and Blood are the medicine of immortality that will overcome all things of this world. For those who choose to remain at home, we offer live streaming and taping to transmit the Word, but for those who desire the gift of the Sacrament, I remain here to offer it.

Jesus shows us through Lazarus that pestilence, terror and even death has no power over us. That's why we have no fear of our most pernicious enemy, death. At its best, death is our friend that takes out of painful situations and at its worst, death is no more for us than an inconvenience. We didn't get to accomplish something we were hoping to accomplish or we didn't get to see something we were hoping to see in this life, although, think about that for a minute. What in the world could you accomplish in this life that is better than heaven? What on earth do you want to see that is superior to the throne room of God Almighty and paradise? Who are you going to mourn when they are enjoying eternal life with everyone they love in heaven?

See, our worries are silly, faithless, nonsense. I know we all fall prey to them, but that is why we come here every week, week

in and week out. We come to feast on his body and blood and hear his Word and remind ourselves once again that he has it all under control and we are just along for the ride.

It is hard for us limited creatures to walk with Jesus. It was hard for the disciples and it continues to be hard for us. Satan is always whispering doubts and trying to get us to believe that death is final, that life is dangerous, that it is all on us. There is nothing in this world that is like what we have. That's why our song is love unknown. Who are we that for our sake, our Lord should take on frail flesh and die? It's ridiculous. But it is true and if you ever find yourself doubting it remember these words, "Lazarus, come out!" And he did. And so too will each one of us.