

Sermon 2011 Lent Five (GIRLS/GUYS NIGHT OUT VIDEO)

April 10, 2011

Text: John 11:5-16

Theme: "Soul Survivor"

Jesus was across the Jordan when he got the call that Lazarus was sick. He was maybe 15 or 20 miles away, but he did not hurry to him. In fact, he stayed where he was and finished up his business there. I often remind people that a lack of planning on their part does not necessitate an emergency on my part but poor Lazarus couldn't really help when he died! Why did Jesus drag his feet? Why didn't he hike up his toga and hurry off to Bethany?

Martha was plenty irritated with him. If you had been here Lord, my brother would not have died! How many times have we also accused Jesus of slacking off on the job? Where was God when 25,000 Japanese people were killed in that earthquake? What is God thinking when he allows bottom of the barrel scum like Charles Manson to live long lives and good people, like Dänya's sister, to die young? Why do self-centered, money-grubbing, people get richer and richer and never seem to have anything bad happen to them, and people who are the pillars of the church and have sacrificed everything for the good of others end up suffering tremendous hardship?

The disciple's thought they were off the hook when Jesus said he had fallen asleep. Whew! Dodged that bullet. If he is just asleep we don't have to go back to Judea where they tried to kill us last time. The Jews were

going to stone Jesus the last time they were in Judea for blasphemy. But then Jesus let them know that by "fallen asleep" he meant the eternal sleep, as in dead and Thomas, probably sarcastically, suggested that perhaps they should all go back to Judea and die with Lazarus. Whether he was being heroic or sarcastic we will never know for sure, but that is exactly what they did. They traveled back into the lion's den. They did not understand why Jesus, if he is all powerful, did not just handle all these issues! Why did they have to fear for their lives? Be uncertain about their futures? Mourn the loss of Lazarus?

Earlier in the book of John, Jesus said something that would have answered all of their concerns. It would have answered all of Martha's concerns. In fact it answers all of our concerns as well.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."

It all comes down to trust. Can we trust God that he knows what he is doing and that he has neither forgotten nor ignored us? Can we trust that he has no ulterior motive. He is only motivated out of love for us and will turn even the bad things for our good? Can we trust him that unlike us, he will not get even with us for our sin? We can hardly imagine a God who

says, yes you sin against me moment by moment and yet I love you, forgive you and bear no grudge against you.

If you never figure this out and spend all of your days in fear of an angry God, you are no less Christian than I. If you find yourself making deals with God on a regular basis rather than simply expecting that he will work everything out for your good, you are still a solid Christian. But there is a higher level to which I strive. I call it a "soul survivor."

St. Paul is a soul survivor. St. Peter is a soul survivor. A soul survivor is one who has survived the tumult of sin and guilt and hardship and learned to claim the prize of salvation in a way that not only affects eternal life but temporal life as well. A soul survivor is one who trusts God and believes that every sin is forgiven because Jesus Christ died on the cross and paid for every sin with his own life and soul. Jesus says it as plainly as possible. He came not to condemn the world but to save the world. Period. Done. It is finished.

That frees me to live. As the Apostles and Martha learned, Jesus acts where and when he chooses and sometimes what seems horrible is only there for the glory of God to show through. So, I am free to relish life no matter what happens. I am free from worry because all things are in God's hands. I am free to see every twist and turn as a new adventure because I don't have to be in control when Jesus has the reigns. I am free to ignore mean people and hurtful gossips and all manner of people who would try to

lift themselves up by putting me down because Christ is running the show and all I have to do is ride along. I don't want to be a Thomas who acts like his faith and life have nothing to do with one another. I don't want to be like Martha who was so consumed with the cares and expectations of the world that she forgot who was standing in front of her. I want to be like St. Paul who having faced his demons boldly proclaimed:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes!” That is a soul survivor – one who uses the bad in life and trusts Jesus with all his heart, knowing that good will be brought forth, forgiveness for all wrong is freely given and we can live joyful lives that are free from the chains of sin, death and the devil.