



HOLY WEEK

2021



CHRIST
CHURCH

JOHN 11:1-16

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him."¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died,¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

DAY 1

JOHN 11:1-5

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

There is so much that we have learned or been reminded of about Jesus these last several weeks. We have seen that he is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. We have seen him as the way, the truth, and the life; the great shepherd; the great I AM. Some of these concepts have stretched our minds, others have stretched our hearts. Today's observation is likely in the heart-stretching category.

The opening paragraph to John 11 is a window into Jesus's relationships. Here we see the true affection that Jesus had for this family of Bethany: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Two times we are told of Jesus's love for these people. We also observe their love for him. They send to him, both out of respect for his power as well as a relational basis. We are given a billboard to a well-known event that will take place in John 12 where Mary will wash Jesus's feet with her hair, an act of deep relational intimacy. And don't forget that these things are being written by the one who identified himself as the "beloved disciple."

What is the point? The point is that when one was around Jesus, one felt accepted, safe, seen, and known. One felt loved. Jesus didn't just tolerate people, he loved them, and they knew it. Pausing here for a moment invites a couple of questions:

- Do I experience Jesus in this way or is my experience of him less relational and more conceptual?
- Do the people around me experience me this way? Do I make them feel loved, or am I too much in a hurry, too focused on my own stuff to really engage them?

The promise is that as we abide in the love of Jesus, we find that his love abides in us and is perfected in us. Friends, let us truly love one another! (cf. 1 John 4:7-12).

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving people not just as a duty but in a way that they could palpably feel. Holy Spirit, open our hearts today to this love. May its reality transform us, give us confidence, and propel us to love others similarly. We love because you have first loved us! We pray these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

DAY 2

JOHN 11:3,4

³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Our current season is one characterized by illness. In this time, we are often reduced to the smaller units within our lives. As individuals, families, and smaller social circles we are waiting for the day when we may gather safely and easily once again.

It is especially in times when we are separated from each other and when we perceive a distance from God that we must continue to turn to our God in faithful prayer. It is God the Holy Spirit who sustains us and makes us who we are. It is by God’s grace that we are his children. These times show us how fickle and unreliable the worldly distractions are that often turn us away from our need to rely on God alone.

As God’s children, we have the privilege to come before him in faith and supplication. We offer up our praises, our laments, our needs, and our sins. We have Jesus Christ as our mediator through whom we speak with our Father. When we come before God in prayer, we give him glory by acknowledging that he is the one who is in control. In our trusting of him, he is glorified.

Pause for a moment of prayer to bring sin, thanksgiving, lament, praise, and need to God.

Jesus was speaking to the fact that Lazarus had not experienced his final earthly death but was going to live again. Jesus’s miracle of giving Lazarus new life brought the Father glory and foreshadowed the power over death that our King has. Because of Jesus, we have hope and we trust in the knowledge that our sin is no longer leading us to ultimate and eternal death.

Jesus worked to glorify the Father in his time on earth. And Jesus’s work glorified God by making possible our rescue from our sins by his payment of the price we owed. Each time God calls us to wait patiently for his timing, we glorify him for the way in which he shapes us. And each time we face difficulty and hold fast to faith and abide in God, we bring him glory.

There are many songs that bring praise to God. Think of one now, and carry it with you in your mind for the rest of the day, glorifying him in everything you do—whether it is work or play, tedious or invigorating, slow or fast. Remember that in all seasons we bring glory to God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100)

PRAYER

Father, encourage us today in our season of waiting. We offer our lament as we bring our burdens to you and our praise for the great, powerful, and loving God you are. Comfort us today with your love, grace, and sustaining mercy as we remember that you are in control of all things. We acknowledge that you alone provide what we need, and we praise you. Thank you for your enduring love and faithfulness. Amen.

DAY 3

JOHN 11:14,15

¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

If Jesus is truly God, and the one who created us (instead of us making him up), then it would follow that he would do and say things that surprise us.

“Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there.”

I'm glad?!?

Why was Jesus glad?

We probably don't experience feeling glad when we find ourselves dealing with that thing that weighs heavily.

Was Joseph glad when he was thrown into a pit by his brothers?

Was Hagar glad to prepare for Ishmael's death when their water ran out in the desert?

Was Bartimaeus glad to be born blind?

...So that we might believe. Believing in him is the goal.

In her article “*Trusting God When Your Pain Seems Pointless*” on The Gospel Coalition website (August 13, 2020), Sarah Taylor writes:

“When we really trust his understanding, we remember that he's our good Shepherd (John 10:11), that he loves us with an everlasting and sacrificial love (1 John 4), that he only does good to us even when it doesn't feel good (Rom. 8:28), that he has plans and purposes beyond what we can imagine (Eph. 3:20), that outwardly we're wasting away but inwardly are being renewed daily (2 Cor. 4:16), that he's refining our faith into pure gold (1 Pet. 1:7), that he's preparing us for eternal glory (2 Cor. 4:17).”

...So that we might believe. Believing in him is the goal.

Yet Jesus is drawing us to believe not just through our sorrows but more so through his presence in our sorrows. Notice how the passage today ends: “But let us go to him.” Lazarus is dead; his sisters are deeply grieving and so confused as to why their dear, loving, powerful friend didn't show up. But he's going to them. And when he shows up, they'll know.

In John 16, Jesus is talking to his disciples, telling them that it will be good for them that he goes away so that he can send the Helper, the Holy Spirit. They talk about where he's going and Jesus says they'll be full of sorrow but that it will turn to joy. He says he's going to the Father and his disciples say, “Ok, now we believe, we get it.” And Jesus keeps at it. He questions them, reveals their hearts to them, all the while assuring them that he'll stick with them through it all:

“Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:31b-33

On this Wednesday of Holy Week we mark again the full extent of what Jesus went through so that he could be with us through his Holy Spirit. Let's help each other remember and believe.

PRAYER

Lord I wait with the psalmist for you to hear my cry, to draw me out of the bog. Set my feet upon you, my rock, that I may sing a song of praise again. Amen.

DAY 4

JOHN 11:9-11

⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”

It is so much easier to work while there is light. Recently a friend of mine told me about an accident he had in the dark. Because his work room was unlit, he couldn't work in it. So he set out to fix the problem. Temporarily illuminating the space with a headlamp, he installed some overhead lights to brighten up the space. While trying to nail an electrical box to the wall, the head lamp wasn't illuminating the space well in the dark. He swung his hammer and missed the nail but smashed his finger! It is so much easier to work while there is light.

Jesus makes reference to this universal truth: *“If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world”* (John 11:9). While this is common-sense language, even for us today, Jesus is speaking directly to the situation at hand. His primary point for his disciples is that as long as Jesus is with them as “the light of the world,” they can see where they are going and are kept secure from the stones of stumbling that the night brings. Yet, it also points to the fact that Jesus's ministry is clearly limited and temporary. In other words, there is a time to do the Father's will, and that time is the day, because what comes after day is night when no one can work. It's a striking sentiment which Jesus has mentioned before: *“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work”* (9:4). What should we make of these statements in John? Here are a few thoughts:

- First, the fact that Jesus must work during the day and that night is coming does not take away from his future glory. John 9 and 11 don't mention this aspect of Jesus, but instead focus on the glory set upon him for his earthly ministry. Yet the rest of John's narrative does include this looking ahead (12:16, 23; 17:14). So we, like the disciples, experience the darkness that comes during Holy Week when we remember the death of our Lord and Savior. It's true nighttime, true darkness. (SPOILER: He rises!) The glory of Jesus comes again as he is taken into heaven to begin his heavenly ministry, the future glory of our risen King.

- Secondly, we can all agree that Jesus had a particular mission, but we must agree that his mission had a time frame. Why else would Jesus use the language of “twelve hours” when referring to his work? This was the agreed-upon way to talk about the hours by which work got done in the time of Jesus. When the sun came up, hour one started and so did the work for the day. When the sun went down, hour twelve had come, and the work stopped. So when Jesus’s earthly ministry carried on and the twelfth hour was upon them, the light that was found in Jesus would go away, and the work of Jesus’s earthly ministry would be finished. Consider Jesus’s words in the High Priestly Prayer in John 17:1-4: *“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”*
- Finally, this work must culminate in the death of Jesus. John reminds us that the death of Jesus on the cross is the essential end to his earthly ministry. It’s the necessary end that will bring about the benefits of the gospel, namely that the sins of God’s people would be forgiven and that the “veil” or barrier between God and his people would finally be overcome. The Son of Man must die and be raised up on the cross because *“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man”* (John 3:13). There was no other way. The Father’s will, which had to be completed during the day, must have its apex in the death of Jesus on the cross.

As we contemplate the life of Jesus on Maundy Thursday, we are reminded of the necessity of doing the Father’s will while it is day. The time was coming for the end of Jesus’s earthly ministry and the beginning of his heavenly ministry, for the returning of the glory he once had with the Father. The raising of Lazarus marked not the prelude to the first installment of Jesus’s heavenly glory but “rather the transition toward the power and darkness of the world, which is the only means by which the Son of man will be lifted up from the earth to draw his own to him, that is, as he gives up his flesh and blood for the live of the world.” (Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 391)

PRAYER

Father, help us to see the brilliance of the day and long for its complete return. Jesus, the Light of the World, will be our very light in the new heavens and the new earth. The need for other sources of illumination seems to be superfluous to a life with Jesus our King. While we navigate this life imperfectly, help us to long for pure light. Help us to remember our King’s commands on that night of the Last Supper: to love one another, to have joy from sorrow, and to remember that Jesus has overcome the world. We pray, Holy Spirit, that the light of life will continue to bring us to a better understanding of our sin and Jesus’s glory. We pray in the name of Jesus, our risen King. Amen.

DAY 5

JOHN 11:7, 8, 16

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸ The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” ... ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

The disciples had witnessed several situations where Jesus had been in great peril. In his hometown of Nazareth, the people wanted to push him over a cliff. John 8 tells how he was threatened with stoning. He was constantly getting into trouble with the Jewish authorities because he kept healing people on the Sabbath. The disciples knew from witnessing these verbal conflicts that the Pharisees were out to get Jesus one way or another. It was clear to them that following Jesus was risky business.

When Jesus hears about Lazarus, he makes plans to go to Judea and Bethany to see his friends there. When they hear of the plans, at least some of the disciples had cold feet. They even objected to the idea. They didn’t want to put Jesus or themselves in danger. Then when it becomes clear to them that Jesus is intent on going, Thomas takes the lead and says “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

His was a realistic assessment. He had seen enough in his years of following Jesus to know the reality of the danger. He also knew that his discipleship had to be lived out by following Jesus no matter what threats they would face. So for us, Good Friday is a necessary reminder of the seriousness of discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Cost of Discipleship*, famously said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Good Friday should remind us of what we need to be willing to give up to follow Jesus—our very lives. Jesus tells us to take up our crosses and follow him. We should expect opposition. We should expect following Jesus to be difficult at times. Missionary Jim Elliot’s often quoted statement is our lesson here: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Good Friday reminds us that our lives here that we often cling to so strongly are temporary, while the life we have with Christ is eternal.

Church tradition says that Thomas’s life ended as a martyr in India after he founded the church there. He didn’t leave any writings behind. We don’t know much about the details of his ministry in India. But we do know we’ll see him in glory. Even now may we kneel to the Author and Finisher of our faith and say with Thomas, “My Lord and my God.”

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, prepare our hearts this day to follow you no matter how difficult that path may be. Prepare us to die if that is what your will is. But also prepare us to know and understand the gift of life we have even now through your resurrection. Help us see through whatever difficulties we may be going through to the glory that is yours and that will be ours.