

Visiting Friends

Lenten Journey: Part 5 “Visiting Friends”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 26, 2023

5th Sunday in Lent

Readings: John 11:1-45

Reflection: Psalm 130

Greeting: Come, let us go to the house of our God. So that he may teach us his ways. And may we walk in God’s paths. Come, let us walk by the light of the Lord! (*Isaiah 2:3-5*)

Prayer: Lord, we ask for your guidance in these forty days. May you help us to prepare our hearts and lives to be transformed by your steadfast love. Be gracious to all who have strayed from your ways like lost sheep, and return us to the fold of your mercy. Help us as we journey with our Savior to know your truth and grace. May we be moved by your Spirit that we may join together to humbly worship you. We pray that you will strengthen us by faith that we may walk in your light and may share your good news with joyful and glad hearts as we celebrate our deliverance from slavery to sin and death through the sacrifice of your Son our Savior. And it is in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. (Psalm 130 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 130 and we hear of forgiveness and hope with the Lord. That God does not hold our failures over us but offers us salvation. What does that forgiveness mean to you? Do you extend forgiveness to others? How has God given you hope? How can you help others to experience the hope that you have found? How has your heart and life been changed because of Christ? How can you share Christ with others in this season of preparation?

Prayer: O God, help us to remember your great compassion for your people as shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. May you help us to prepare to have our hearts and lives be changed through your mercy and grace. May your steadfast love inspire and strengthen us in these forty days. It is with penitent and grateful hearts that we come before to share our joys and our concerns on this day. We ask that you lift us up in both our laughter and our tears so

that we may know your compassion. May you bless us in both our celebrations and our sorrows so that we may know that you are always with us, and may we always be thankful for your faithfulness as shown through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from John chapter 11 verse 1 through verse 45.

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and

see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. (John 11:1-45 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week we end this series as our journey connects us with friends. We begin our reading in a rather unusual way. Jesus is sent a message that his friend is ill. Instead of going right away, Jesus waits. The waiting is because Jesus says that this will not lead to death but instead will glorify God, and so that the Son of God may be glorified. So, they stay for two more days before they leave. Jesus then tells the disciples they are heading back to Judea, and after some confusion, they set out with him. When they get there, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. Martha comes out to greet Jesus. Martha says that if Jesus had been there sooner, her brother would not have died. Not an accusation though, but a statement of faith. She believes that had Jesus been present, he would have had power to prevent the death, and she still believes that God will do whatever he asks. Honestly, she has more faith than the disciples, who don't even have enough faith to think that they are not going to their own deaths in traveling with Jesus. Now, it's then that Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise again and Martha accepts this knowing that the dead will rise when they are resurrected on the last day. So, this statement really doesn't impact her. However, his reply is that “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” And Martha says that she does believe that Jesus is the Son of God that he's the Messiah. We see that Martha has a tremendous amount of faith in Jesus at this point. She has no qualms with saying that she believes that he is the Son of God. She believes that he is the Messiah. Honestly, it seems as if his friends have much more faith than his followers. And I think it is because she is his friend. Jesus followers are all looking to him for answers to their questions and are always struggling to understand. Martha, however, seems to have a more complete faith in Christ. She sees a friend that she trusts completely. She doesn't need him to explain himself, she believes him because he is her friend.

I think it is important for us to stop and think about this relationship. Because this relationship demonstrates some mutual trust between friends. We see something stronger here than we see with others and Christ. It isn't that they see a miracle and then believe. They know

Jesus, and that is enough for them to believe. Their belief isn't dependent upon signs, but it hinges completely upon Christ. And it is there because they are his friends. Now, it's at this point that Martha goes back and gets Mary. Mary hears that Jesus is looking for her and she quickly goes to him. All of the people who have come to mourn with Mary follow her thinking that she's going to the tomb. Mary has the same type of statement that Martha had. Had Jesus been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died. Again, I don't think it's an accusation. I think it's a statement of faith. She kneels before Jesus, says this, and weeps. And Jesus is moved. I think part of it is that she could blame him. She could ask why he wasn't there. Instead, we see faith. Mary shows that she still has faith in Jesus, even in this time of distress. And I think it is here that the grief becomes just too much for Jesus. Because even knowing what will happen, he is faced with the death of a beloved friend. And he is faced with the very real sorrow in these people that he loves. He asks where they have laid Lazarus, and he weeps. For the sorrow of his friends and for the death of his friend he weeps. There's a mixed reaction from the people there. Some want to know if Jesus could have done something. After all, if he could heal a man born blind he surely could have saved Lazarus. But others see Jesus weeping and see how much he loved his friend. In a way, both a right. Had Jesus been there, things would have been different. But he also loves these people dearly. What they don't know is that there is still something more that Jesus can do for his beloved friend. They reach the tomb and Jesus asks that they roll the stone away. Martha tries to tell him that the smell is going to be overwhelming. She seems to think that Jesus is just wanting to go in and see him, with no understanding about what it is he is about to do. Then Christ tells her "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" And that is enough for her. They move the stone away from the opening, and Jesus speaks. He says that he's speaking aloud so that the crowd will know that he is sent by God. And with that, he cries out for Lazarus to leave the grave. And he does, still wrapped in his burial cloth. And many people come to believe in him because of what they had seen.

But what really struck me was that we had two people in this story that believed without seeing what he did. The miracle is not what caught my attention this week. Don't take that the wrong way though. Raising the dead is a noteworthy miracle that demonstrates the glory of God shown through the love of Christ. But what I found most interesting in John's account is that Martha and Mary demonstrate a tremendous faith. Martha has no problem proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah. She readily calls him the Son of God, and she believes. She fully believes that he could have healed Lazarus without issue. She fully believes that God will listen to him and that whatever he wills will be done. That is an amazing faith to have! And that stood out to me in this account. Because it tells us something about our own relationship with Christ. Martha and Mary recognize what could have been while never discounting what is. They never accuse Jesus of any wrongdoing. They don't put the blame on him. Instead, they still simply have faith in Jesus, their friend. They see him as a friend and they trust him as a friend. They have faith in him as a friend who has come to be with them and would readily help them if he could. And he does in a way greater than they imagined. When Jesus tells Martha that her

brother will raise again, she responds that she understands that he will someday be raised. But Jesus then says something that I think plays into the mystery of faith. "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" And Martha believes. She believes without fully understanding what that meant. Now, we might ask how she could believe in something she didn't fully comprehend? That part is simple. She trusted her friend. She trusted that if Jesus was telling her this, that she could believe it. Because she knew in her heart who he was and that he loved her as a friend. Because of that, she could trust him even when she didn't fully know what he meant. And I take comfort in that, because I can tell you truthfully that I can't fully comprehend the depth of that statement. Because I can read it and come up with answers, and still be left with questions. There are many places in the Bible that I still have questions. There is still mystery abounding. But you know what? I have faith in Christ, my friend. I cannot fully explain every mystery of faith. But I do trust that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. I take comfort in knowing that my friend is there for me in life and in death. That he is there for me because of his great love. And that is why I focused on friendship today. Because it's those who understand Jesus best and have the closest relationship with him that put the most faith in him. They have complete trust and faith in his ability and what will happen next. Not because they are simply looking for a teacher to teach. Not because they are looking for a king to command. But because they know a friend through love. So, as we explore the scriptures and come nearer to the end of this season of preparation, I pray that we can search both the Scriptures and our hearts for a deeper understanding of Christ as our friend. And I pray that we explore what that friendship means to us. And I pray that we strive to understand how it changes our hearts and lives as we prepare ourselves for the Resurrection, so that we may understand what the death and the life of a friend can mean. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Lenten Journey

Our current series is a journey through Lent. Each week we have a story of Jesus that helps us as we prepare ourselves during Lent. As we travel through these forty days with Christ, we learn important lessons along the way.

February 26th – *To the Wilderness* – Matthew 3:13-4:17

March 5th – *Meeting by Night* – John 3:1-17

March 12th – *Going to the Well* – John 4:5-42

March 19th – *Seeing the Path* – John 9:1-41

March 26th – *Visiting Friends* – John 11:1-45

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Our Healthcare Workers	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Phyllis Gabel	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Phil Hawickhorst
Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Family of Kyle Lehman	Corrine Howard	Stacy Janes	Don Gilmore
Shirley Jester	Connie Brown	Jack Pitcher	Family of Alberta Darling
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins		

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