3-29-20, The Holy Way

Sermon on John 11:45

1. Introduction
2. It isn’t clear to us where Jesus is at the beginning of this story.
3. In the previous chapter, he had been in Jerusalem, where some of the religious leaders had been ready to stone him for blasphemy. It appears that, at the beginning of this story, he has gone somewhere some distance from Jerusalem.
4. For John, a critical part of understanding Jesus is to understand that Jesus is life.
5. As is so common in John, there is the use of light and dark, day and night, reflecting what is of God and what is not.
6. Prayer
7. The text
8. (v. 1—6) **The news about Lazarus** Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. [Bethany is a suburb of Jerusalem, where they had been planning to one Jesus to death.] Mary is the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. [John tells this story of the anointing of Jesus’ feet in John 12.]
9. (v. 3) So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”
10. (v. 4) But, when Jesus head it,
11. (v. 4b) he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of Man may be glorified through it.”
12. (v. 5 & 6) 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.
13. (v. 7—16) **Jesus acts** Then after this he said, “Let us go to Judea again.”
14. (v. 8) The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews [remember, in John this refers to the Jewish religious leadership] were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?”
15. (v. 9 & 10) Jesus answered
16. (v. 9b) “Are there not twelve hours of daylight?
17. (v. 9c) Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world
18. (v. 10) But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.”
19. (v. 11—16) After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.”
20. (v. 12) The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be alright.” [We can see that they don’t get it, but we already know the end of the story.]
21. (v. 13) Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought he was referring merely to sleep.
22. (v. 14 & 15) 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.”
23. (v. 16) Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” [Thomas is pessimistic, but brave.]
24. (v. 17—27) **Jesus and Martha** When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. [Lazarus is clearly dead after four days, but there is an added significance. There was a belief in the Judaism of the time that, for the three days following a death, the soul of the dead person would return to the tomb trying to re-connect with the body. After three days, the soul was gone away.
25. (v. 18 & 19) Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, [In Greek, the statement is “fifteen stadia.” A stadion was approximately 1/8 of a mile.] and many of the Jews [leadership] had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.
26. (v. 20—27) When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary stayed home.
27. (v. 21) Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.
28. (v. 22) But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” [Martha has an incomplete understanding of who Jesus is, but she does understand that Jesus’ relationship with God is something unique. Interestingly, she doesn’t ask Jesus to do anything specific.]
29. (v. 23) Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”
30. (v. 24) Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”
31. (v. 25—27) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.
32. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live
33. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.
34. Do you believe this?”
35. (v. 27) She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” [Martha confesses as much as she knows and understands at this moment.]
36. (v. 28—37) **Jesus and Lazarus** 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.”
37. (v. 29—31) And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.
38. (v. 30) Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.
39. (v. 31a) The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out.
40. (v. 31b) They followed her because they thought she was going to the tomb to weep there.
41. (v. 32) 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.”
42. (v. 33—37) When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping , he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. [This is a word that connotes extreme anger. It appears that Jesus was angry at death and the pain that it was causing to those whom he loved.]
43. (v. 34a) He said, “Where have you laid him?”
44. (v. 34b) They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”
45. (v. 35) Jesus began to weep. [Jesus is deeply touched by the grief of his friends, even though he knows that he will turn their grief to joy.]
46. (v. 36) So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”
47. (v. 37) But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”
48. **(**v. 38—45**) Jesus and Lazarus** Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. [This stone would have been cut into a rough disk shape, large enough in diameter to cover the opening to the tomb. The stone was set in a slanted channel, so that gravity kept it at the opening. To enter the tomb, it would be necessary to roll the stone disk up the channel and block it there.]
49. **(**v. 39 & 40) Jesus said, Take away the stone.”
50. **(**v. 39b) Martha, the sister of the dead man [who has apparently followed along to the tomb] said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.” [No kind of embalming was used in Israel]
51. (v. 40) Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”
52. (v. 41—45) So they took away the stone
53. (v. 41b & 42) And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me [Jesus is in constant communication with God], but this is for the sake of the crowd standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”
54. (v. 43) When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” [This is not an invitation; it is a command.]
55. (v. 44a) The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped with a cloth.
56. (v. 44b) Jesus said to them, “Unbind him and let him go.”
57. (v. 45) Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.
58. So, what?

This story continues that, among those who witnessed the return of Lazarus from death to life, there were some who went to the Pharisees and reported it. Members of the Sanhedrin comes together and they are persuaded that Jesus must die, otherwise there will be a religious uprising that will bring about a crushing response by the Romans.

Jesus has demonstrated that he has all the power and authority he holds as the Son of God. This miracle takes away all doubt. And, at the same time, it is this miracle, performed only a couple of miles from Jerusalem, which crystalizes the response of the religious authorities and. Ultimately, leads to the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus gives life to Lazarus, and then, in his crucifixion and his resurrection, gives life to all.

This is the Jesus we worship. Jesus has all power and all authority and all love and all righteousness. This is the Jesus we turn to at a time when we can’t gather together in worship. This is the Jesus we turn to when we are required or encouraged to stay in our homes and avoid gathering with others. This is the Jesus we worship when we can’t visit our friends in hospitals and nursing homes. This is the Jesus when we are tired of it all. And this is the Jesus we worship when we are afraid that we may get the virus.

What will Jesus do in this present moment? Very simply, I don’t know. Will the virus simply disappear miraculously? I don’t know. Will it mutate and affect huge numbers in this country and other countries? I don’t know.

Here’s what I do know: Jesus, the carpenter’s son from Galilee, is the Lord, the Messiah, the Son of God. I also know that, regardless of what happens here or anyplace else, you and I belong, body and soul, to this Jesus. He has purchased us by his death on the cross.

S, how will we respond in this time of confusion and disruption? I believe the only thing we can do is love. We can love one another, we can love our neighbors we don’t know, we can love all those with whom we share this planet.

A couple of nights ago Lou and I were cleaning up after dinner when our doorbell rand. It was our neighbors’ little girl, who told us that she and her parents were going to the grocery store and wondered if they could pick anything up for us. This has never happened before, but they’ve made the decision to respond to this environment with love and kindness.

We read and hear stories of people who are hoarding goods. We read and hear about those who are engaging in price-gouging for needed supplies. But we also hear stories of sharing, of providing meals, of coming together. In Italy, we hear stories of neighbors, restricted to their apartments, standing on the balconies singing together.

My dear sisters and brothers, there is indeed ugliness in the world. But there is also exquisite beauty. My plea and my prayer for me and for you, is that we will find all the beauty there is, and that we will reflect that beauty, grounded in the love of Jesus the Christ, to all the world. May it be so. Amen