

Where have you been? That is what I asked my Mom's priest as I stood by her bed, the bed Hospice had brought in. We had flown to Florida when Mom's Cancer got worse. I was beside myself as I had trouble getting a flight due to snowstorms – it was January of course! I asked my sister if she had called the priest and she said yes, but... But what? My Mom was a faithful church attendee so why wasn't he there. I was not like Martha and Mary – I did not expect a priest to heal, only give my Mom Holy Unction – an oil for spiritual and physical healing. When the priest finally came, I must admit I showed my frustration. When you love someone who is dying, you want all the help you can get.

This experience made me think how much worse it was for Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. They sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. Lazarus was His friend, so I am sure they were expecting Jesus to come quickly but that didn't happen. Now to be fair, the Gospel says, "he whom you love is ill" or "your dear friend is very sick", depending on the biblical translation. They did not say, come quick he is dying, but the fact they sent that message should have been an indication of severity.

Not only does Jesus **not** go, he stays where he is because he says, the illness isn't going to kill him but is happening for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this – what? Martha and Mary must have been frantically waiting Jesus did not show up for two days. Do you know how far away he was? *Less than 2 miles!!*

Jesus decides it is time to go and says to the disciples, "Let's head back to Judea". They think Jesus is crazy to head back there again since the people tried to stone him the last time he was there but Jesus tells them there are 12 hours of daylight and people can walk safely in the light, but they can stumble if they have no light. They are clueless to what he means. Jesus says he is going back because Lazarus has fallen asleep, and he needs to wake him up. Again, clueless because sick people need to sleep to recover

Jesus decides he has done enough with metaphors and says, "Lazarus is dead". No tip toeing around now but once again Jesus causes his followers confusion by saying he is **glad** he wasn't there because now they will really believe! Let's go see him. Really, just like that – now we are going to go and see him? The disciples were not highly educated men, just salt of the earth regular guys so these metaphors were confusing to them.

When they finally get there, Martha runs out to greet him and says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Yes, a guilt trip but can you blame her? She goes on to say she know that even now God will give Jesus whatever he asks for. Jesus tries to comfort her by saying your brother will rise again but Martha thinks he is comforting her because at the last days, the Pharisees (not the Sadducees) believed in the resurrection of the body based on the Book of Daniel. But, that is not what Jesus means. Then Jesus says, *"I am the resurrection and the life.^[e] The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this, Martha?"* And of course, Martha says she does.

Martha's sister Mary is in the house surrounded by mourners who had come from Jerusalem (just a couple of miles away). Martha goes to Mary, and whispers that the Teacher is here and wants to see. Mary goes right out to see him, she falls at his feet and guess what she says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Guilt times two!

When the mourners saw her leave quickly, they thought she was going to the tomb to mourn. They followed Mary crying, and Mary was crying, Martha was crying.....it was all overwhelming! There are several interpretations describing how Jesus felt but it was anguish, then Jesus asks where Lazarus has been laid, they tell him to come and see. We then hear the words "Jesus wept" – the one Bible phrase everyone knows.

When people saw Jesus weep, some of the Jews said, "see how he loved them", but then there are always *those* people, you know the ones! If he could heal a blind man, why didn't he come sooner and saved his friend??

Jesus gets to the tomb and it's a cave with a stone in front of it and Jesus tells them, "Take away the stone". Let's top for a minute – is any of this sounding familiar? Perhaps we will be hearing this a bit differently in a couple of weeks?

Okay I digress. Martha says "no", because Lazarus had been dead for four days so there will be a terrible stench. The ointments and spices they used to cover the body would no longer be working. Jesus reminds Martha, "if you believe, you will see the glory of God." Jesus looks up and says, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they

may believe that you sent me.” Then Jesus called out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out!”

Lazarus comes out with his grave cloth wrappings all around his face and body. Jesus tells them to untie him and let him go. Martha and Mary are thrilled and now the Jewish crowd believes him, but this very act is the beginning of the plot to kill Jesus as many of the Jews went back and told the Pharisees and Sadducees what Jesus had done.

I will be honest, when I looked at the lectionary reading for today, I thought – oh, everyone knows Jesus raised Lazarus who was dead. What can I say that people have not heard before. What can we take away from this reading? Then I went read the Gospel of John again and looked at it in comparison to Matthew, Mark and Luke, and for the first time became aware of the fact that they focus on parables. John focuses on events and miracles. John relates both the humanity and the deity of Jesus. John gives us miracles and stories to show Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah:

- ◇ Water into wine at the wedding in Cana – Jesus’ first miracle and it served to show the disciples his power. It showed the disciples how Jesus would work – through ordinary people, sinful people, innocent children, it did not matter. Jesus used people to show his caring.
- ◇ The official’s son in Cana – this official had a critically ill son and he walked 20 miles to beg Jesus to come and heal his son, but Jesus told him, “Go back home. Your son will live!” The official believed him and left for home but on the way he ran into his servants who told him the boy’s fever had broken at 1:00pm, the exact time that Jesus said, “Your son will live.” This is believing without seeing!
- ◇ Jesus walked on water – Not only did he walk on water, he calmed the strong winds and waves. We need Jesus to do the same for us – to keep us from being afraid. He can calm the storms in our lives.
- ◇ The bread Jesus multiplied to feed the 5,000 with 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fish– Jesus, the Bread of life, fills our spiritual hunger.
- ◇ The blind man Jesus healed – Jesus is the light of the world and it is so easy to see things clearly in the light – Jesus is the light we need, the light to sharpen our spiritual vision.

- ◇ Lame man is healed – This man had been lame for 38 years lying by this healing pool, but he was never quick enough to get into to the

pool when it bubbled (when the pool healed). Jesus asked him if he wanted to be well, then told him to pick up his mat and walk. And so he did! But the man got in trouble with the religious leaders for carrying his mat on the Sabbath. Let us not be tied down by man-made rules and policies like the Pharisees but focus on helping people and remember Jesus forgives!

- ◇ Jesus kept the adulterous woman from being stoned. The religious leaders asked Jesus what to do about her, trying to trap him – if he said not to stone her, he would violate the laws of Moses but if said yes to stoning her, they would go to the Romans and Jesus would be in violation of the rules against Jews carrying out their own executions. Jesus teaches not to judge.

The last lesson is Lazarus – are we spiritually dead? Are doing things by rote or do we have deep faith? Do we need Jesus to call to us: “Come out!!” Or are we alive in Christ, enjoying all our blessings, thanking God for our lives? Are we sharing our gifts, our joys, our service with others? Are we trying to live with our eyes open, quenching our thirst and our hunger for Christ by being deeply involved with His teachings? Are we helping and not judging others? This is the message and the ministry of Jesus, the Son of God.

Amen!