

February 6, 2022 7 Words of Jesus Pt. 5 John 11:17-44

In preparation for Lent, and the journey toward Easter we are looking at 7 words of Jesus. We began with “truth. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 3:3) The second word was, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.” (Mark 1:15) The 3rd word was, “Man does not live by bread alone.” (Matthew 4:4) And the 4th word was, “It is finished.” (John 19:30).

To this string we now add John 11:25: “Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

The scene is important. It is charged with emotion. Lazarus fell ill and he died. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, sent word to Jesus that their brother was seriously ill. For his own reasons Jesus let two days pass before he began the journey to Bethany where the sisters and Lazarus were living. When Jesus arrives, the funeral for Lazarus has already happened and the body has been in a tomb for 4 days. According to Jewish custom, the period of mourning is continuing.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she left the crowd of mourners, and began walking down the road to meet Jesus. Her grief was real and raw. She gives Jesus a piece

of her mind. First there is an accusation. Then a statement of faith. The accusation was full of her anger, her grief and her pain. “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.” The accusation is to the effect, Jesus is late. Had HE come when he was called, HE could have prevented all of this. The statement of faith is her belief that Jesus can ask HIS Father in heaven for anything, and HIS prayer will be heard and granted. She is saying, YOU can do something so do it!

What are we to make of all of this? It is clear that Lazarus, Mary and Martha are more than just friends. They have been with Jesus when HE taught. They have witnessed the power of God not only in HIS words but in healing miracles. Martha knows what Jesus can do because she has seen HIM do it, and she has heard the stories that are spilling through the country concerning Jesus ministry. She is a believer, and a believer who is experiencing full blown grief at the loss of a beloved brother. Martha states in crystal clear terms what she believes: that Jesus “is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.”(vs. 27) In fact it is her response when Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Martha returns to her house, and tells Mary that Jesus is at the outskirts of Bethany.

Mary goes to Jesus. The mourners who have gathered follow her and witness what occurs. For one thing, the

first thing Mary says, is what Martha said. The accusation! If you had been here my brother would not have died! The words sting. The mourners are weeping. And Jesus is moved by the whole experience including his own sense of loss of a good friend. HE is not cool like ice. HE feels what the crowd and Mary and Martha are feeling. And Jesus asks the question, "Where have you laid him." (vs, 33) They, Mary, Martha, and the crowd take him to the tomb. The humanity of the Son of God is captured in the shortest verse in the whole of the Bible. "Jesus wept." (vs. 35) It was not a show, or an opportunity to act like he cared...HE felt what they felt. Jesus felt what we feel at the graveside of someone we care about. The loss is undeniable. Death cannot be swept under the rug. The Son of Man weeps. And people notice. And some of them are thinking and muttering what Mary and Martha have put into words. Jesus healed a blind man. Could he not have prevented this death?

Jesus gives instruction. Roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. There are objections naturally. "There will be a bad odor, for he has been there four days." It is more rank in the KJV, the word for word translation: "he stinketh." Martha's actual words in Elizabethan English. You know what happens next. Jesus prays. He commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb. And he does.

"I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus is. When HE uses those words "I am" HE is saying words Moses heard. Moses asked God, if I go to the Hebrews in Egypt, they are going to ask me who sent me. God, what is your name? God

replied, "I am that I am. I am has sent you." Jesus says I am the lamb of God. I am the resurrection and the life. It is a claim of divinity, immediately backed up by a demonstration, a sign, a wonder, that can only be accepted as a sign of divinity or rejected as not having happened. Jesus made the claim. Then HE called Lazarus back from the dead. And remember, this is not the only time HE resurrects someone. And of course on Easter morning, early on a Sunday morning, HE rises from the dead.

In this 5th word Jesus says a number of things. HE says whoever believes in HIM will live even though he dies. We are mortal. And that has not changed. We are subject to the laws of our mortality. But recognizing who Jesus is, changes everything. Believing Jesus, we have the promise we will live, even though we experience death. Thousands have died during this Pandemic, in Canada. Millions have died world wide. Every single death that occurs leaves people devastated by grief and a sense of loss. The promise made by Jesus to Martha and you and I, is that believing in HIM, we will live even though we die.

It is typical of the Hebrew way of teaching important things by repeating the lesson in slightly different words for emphasis. "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die." What that means is "Whoever lives in me and believes in me, will never die." How we live is important. Jesus calls us to care about our neighbours, and to submit to the governmental authority over us. And HE calls us in the midst of all our frustrations and pains to believe HIM. He promises that

death will never have the last word. And remember this: the influence of men and women over those around them ends when the body dies. A singular fact has to be faced. Jesus...I am not talking about the church....Jesus influences more people and how they live and die, today, than HE did at any point during HIS 33 years on earth. HE promises us, as HE promised Martha, that we will live even if our bodies give out. If you are my age you are tempted to say, we will live, even when our bodies give out.

Jesus looked Martha and Mary in the eye. HE did not say, "Get over it. It's part of the life cycle. People come and people go." He asked her a question given what she had learned from HIM and seen HIM do. "I am the resurrection and the life....Do you believe this?"

That question is still one of the most important things Jesus said. The rest of verses 25 and 26 in John 11 come down to hearing that question and answering it. We make a choice. And it is an important choice. It is about life and life that is eternal. Most of us have not seen the things that Mary and Martha and Lazarus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter and Thomas and Paul saw. That's not a complete list either. But we have been told what they saw. And the records are dependable and sound. Some of us have carelessly said, I have seen a miracle. We still must face the question. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life....Do you believe this? Faith is not a closing of the mind, it is a choice to open it. We make the

choice and we live accordingly. Eternity awaits. Do you believe this?

Let us pray;

Dear Lord, Holy God, Spirit of peace and joy, receive our praise as we share in a time of worship before you. We have opened the Scriptures. We have heard the words Jesus spoke in Bethany so many years ago. And we have heard the testimony of John who was there and continued to live in times of persecution and still held to the faith he found in Jesus. Help us Lord to weigh YOUR words carefully. Move us and help us to answer YOUR question as Martha and Mary did. And to live in the faith we find in YOU. Lead us. School us. And help us to serve your HOLY purpose. In Jesus name we pray. Amen