

SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE**John 11:1-45****(Read John 11:1-11)**

Intro: Before I begin this sermon proper – allow me to take three small detours (not bunny trails) to briefly cover some things I'd like for you to ponder here in this passage:

First: One thing that is very obvious is that this family was special to Jesus. This isn't because Jesus played favorites, but because this particular account which includes this particular family perfectly fits in what God wants us to know. Jesus loves everyone and loves us all individually. The fact is, we all get honorable mention in his mind. And we see that in how each one in this family is individually mentioned. There is Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Jesus loved them all. He loved them individually. For who they were. That's exactly how he sees you too. Don't forget that.

Second: The Greeks believed in unfeeling, uninvolved gods – in fact, their gods were so wrapped up in themselves that they only concerned themselves with themselves. On the other hand, Jesus, who is God the son, felt. He felt very deeply. We see that here in our text – especially in verses 33-38. It says he was “*deeply moved in his spirit*” (verses 33 and 38) and that he wept (verse 35). The description of his weeping here is of a deep, deep sadness at the loss that the sisters had experienced and that the world had experienced in losing Lazarus. Let me remind you again, that we know how this story ends – we just read the account – **THIS IS A MAN HE WAS GOING TO RAISE FROM THE DEAD**. He already knew that. But Jesus felt deeply. And not only that, it says that he walked up to the grave and he groaned, and in Greek it's the word used for the snorting of a horse or the angry growl of an animal. His was a deep guttural grief. He groaned in anger that Lazarus was in the tomb because death really ticked Jesus off. Jesus felt deeply. Think about that.

And this for the third detour: Martha told Mary “*The teacher is here and is calling for you.*” John 11:28b. Here is something very basic: These sisters knew Jesus as **THE TEACHER**. This was in a culture where rabbis refused to teach women. Women weren't worthy in their minds to be educated. If any teaching went on, it was because women taught themselves and then passed it on to their daughters. Jesus taught otherwise. Everybody was welcome to learn no matter who they were, male or female. Think about that.

Now, back to the message at hand:

Jesus says two times in our passage that everything that happened here is “*So that you may believe.*” John 11:15b and then speaking to his heavenly father, “. . . *that they may believe that you sent me.*” John 11:42. Jesus did everything he did, so that we might believe and also, as Holy Week, as we now know it, was approaching, so that all could have a foretaste of the Resurrection.

One of my few funerals when I was in my first assignment as a lead pastor at Speedwell Heights Brethren in Christ Church in the late '80s, was for Anna Faus. Anna died in 1988 at the age of 90 years old. She had been invalid for most of her life. In the early 1920s, her sister had come home from mission work in Africa, and Anna had helped her unpack her suitcases. It was always suspected, though, never confirmed, that from that process, Anna contracted some kind of exotic disease that slowly stole away her mobility until she was a cripple in a rest home and this was her home for at least 50 of her years. She never married, of course. She never did lots of things that a young lady might have aspired to do, but she always had a strong faith in her Lord. That meant that the sense of joy that made her funeral a huge celebration was a lesson in the hope of resurrection for this young pastor. Her brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews were celebrating the fact that their dear Anna was no longer a captive of a diseased and deteriorating body. Instead she was free and enjoying the resurrection life of eternity.

This is the Hope of the Resurrection.

Here in John 11, Jesus was on the road to the Cross and eventually his Resurrection. We find him in Bethany across the Jordan River to the east where he and his disciples enjoyed little trouble from the religious leaders who were jealous of his following. Bethany, east of the Jordan was several days walk, which was the main transportation in those days, from Bethany, right outside of Jerusalem, where this dear family lived.

He and his disciples have received word that his good friend Lazarus is deathly ill. The truth is, Lazarus was probably dead before the message even reached Jesus. But of course we know that that wasn't a problem for Jesus, he's God. He can do what he wants. And he did.

You see. . .

The end for a Christ follower is glory to God and not death

- Jesus saw this coming because nothing catches God by surprise. Everything he did was part of the unfurling of God's plan for all humanity.
- But, God follows his own timetable. And even though he loved these sisters and their sick brother so much, he stayed where he was because Jesus never let anyone tell him what to do. So when they when they ordered Jesus to Bethany, he sat around for two more days.
- Even when he was reminded of how ill his friend was thinking about God's plan, “*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.*” John 11:4.
- Yep – God works on his own initiative and on his own time frame as his disciples wondered, and the sisters had their faith in their friend tested to the extreme. They felt abandoned and maybe unloved.
- But. . .

A testing of our faith is not a denial of God's love

- Sickness and death and hardship enters homes even where God is honored and loved and selflessly served. That was Anna Faus's life, and we have experienced it and continue to here at ABC. But, it helps us grow – and it helps us believe, and yes –

God is glorified. These difficulties, as awful as they might be are permitted because they provide an opportunity and even a platform for his deliverance.

- But that didn't make the sisters any happier. Both of them separately said the same thing when they saw Jesus for the first time as he arrived: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* Martha in verse 21 and Mary in verse 32. And here's another thing to ponder. When we get angry at God, when we doubt God, when we scream at God – know this: God can take our honesty. He's big enough to handle it. He loves us through it. So when we have our faith tested – know God is not loving us less – he's helping our faith grow – so that we may believe.
- And notice the sweet faith the sisters had. Martha was so broken and she confronted Jesus with, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* John 11:21, and then in faith she says, *"But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."* John 11:22 One commentator said this in response – "There is great power in "Even now" prayers."
- No matter how desperate you are – you can pray – Even Now Lord!
- Jesus was making some audacious claims here. In fact . . .

Only God could make the claims Jesus did BECAUSE HE'S GOD!

- He IS the Resurrection in the life. Jesus IS the only way. Jesus, even with his groans of grief was the only way out of this death mess. He remains the ONLY way out of this mess we live in. He was headed toward Easter as he fulfilled the plan to make that only way.
- And here, just shortly before Good Friday, we see that Lazarus's resurrection was a foretaste of Jesus's Resurrection – which made the way for OUR resurrection. So Jesus had to wait for two days too long two day's journey away, and he had to wait to raise Lazarus – to show the plan that was unfolding to reveal that apart from Jesus Christ, there is neither resurrection nor life.
- And here is another truth that comes out of this, Jesus is able to raise the dead anytime, not just in the future. You think about that.
- And finally this . . .

Conclusion: The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray and the simple outline he gave us there is what we know as The Lord's Prayer. But here's another way that Jesus teaches us to pray. It is his prayer to his heavenly father as he prepared to call Lazarus from the grave: *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me"* John 11:42. How about that for the preface to all your prayers?

Then he goes on: *"but I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me."* John 11:43. Thank God for what he's going to do before he does it.

As I close this let me suggest a take-away for this talk. It's from Pastor Lionel Whiston. He suggests this. *"Try a 30-day experiment: stop asking God for anything. Instead of the prayer of petition, use the prayer of affirmation."* Whiston injects a clarification here and assures us with, *"The prayer of petition is not wrong. Jesus used it frequently, but we get it in the habit of using it exclusively and are so robbed of the joy and power of the prayer of affirmation. Instead of asking God to protect or guide your loved ones, affirm that it is so. Instead of asking God to heal you or others when sick, thank him that he is already doing it. To learn to pray with affirmation, start your prayers in some such way as, 'God I thank you that . . .' or, 'My father I rejoice that. . .'"*

We can make that really personal for us here at ABC with *"Thank you for what you're already doing on Leia's life and for the healing you are sending."* Let's learn from Jesus's prayer. And look how it worked, When Martha protested when Jesus asked to have the stone rolled away, she showed that she didn't understand Jesus's purpose or think that he could do what he intended to do. She had spoken with rote faith when he first arrived but he needed to remind her that he had promised that if she believed she would see the glory of God. Expectant believers can and will see God's power. It was present and active in Jesus outside Lazarus's tomb to achieve his divine purpose and plan – and it's still present and active – are you expecting that when you pray? He did it so that we may believe. Amen.