

WHY WAIT?
John 11:1-16

Read John 11:1-16

Intro: Why did Jesus wait? His friends had sent a message that Jesus's good friend, Lazarus, was ill. But Jesus just stayed there, a couple days travel away in the region east of the Jordan River, purposely making no effort to go to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Why?!

Young parents will tell you and those of us who aren't so young anymore, remember that when our child cried out in the middle of the night, you might just lay there, quietly, hoping against hope that it was some spontaneous start in their sleep and they are sleeping on. But if they continue crying and, better yet, if they cry out asking for Mommy or Daddy, you bet your bottom dollar, you are there for them in seconds flat. We don't wait around when our kids need us.

The other night Ron & Linda's friend Becky lay in the hospital in Canton, very near death with her husband Kevin at her side. They called Kevin and asked if they should come and be with him and his answer was a prompt affirmative. So Ron and Linda didn't wait – they left immediately for Canton. That's what you do when it's your friends.

So why did Jesus wait? What kind of friend does that? Let's look into it. First, let's look at . . .

Who do you call upon when it looks bleak?

- No! Not Ghost Busters!
- But seriously, it's interesting even in a society that is more and more distancing itself from God as it thinks itself less and less in need of him, that we, without hesitation turn to him when crisis hits. Remember how, in the days, weeks, and months after September 11, 2001 our nation turned out in droves to church services and prayers services. People hung on every word from Billy Graham, who was called, "the nation's pastor", as he brought words of comfort from scripture. Yes – when the going gets rough, we cry out to God.
- When people get sick, and their mortality is very evident, they call out to one who is greater than they. My friend, Kevin, was a hard living young father who, when I first met him, wouldn't give me the time of day. But when his wife left him for another man, he turned to me and my church in desperation. His childhood teaching in the Moravian Church came back to him and he knew from where his help came from. His wife never came back to him, but Kevin called out to God and now over 20 years later he is one of the most dedicated Christ Followers I know. Over the past two years he has battled cancer, and he has had the strength of Jesus carrying each step.
- Who do you cry out to when the going gets rough? I hope your first thought is to call for Jesus. Elisha Huffman knew this and sang,

*I must tell Jesus all of my trials,
I cannot bear these burdens alone;
In my distress He kindly will help me,
He ever loves and cares for His own.
I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
I cannot bear my burdens alone;
I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.*

- We can count on Jesus when we call. That's why it was so puzzling for Jesus's disciples, and ultimately for Lazarus's sisters, why Jesus didn't immediately pack up and head for Bethany when he got word of his sick friend. So . . .

Why DID Jesus wait?

- Lazarus is sick! Sick was a terrifying word in those days. If your eyesight began to fade, you had to simply accept your fate. There were no glasses and you would eventually go blind. If you were born with some kind of crippling defect, there were no orthopedic surgeons to perform miraculous corrective surgery and you would be lame all of your days. And if you suddenly took sick with a fever, well, that was the most terrifying thing! There were no antibiotics or even pain killers. Being "*fearfully and wonderfully made*" as Psalm 139 professes, many illnesses would be fought off by the body's natural defenses. But many others were fatal.

- There must have been something about Lazarus’s illness that did not bode well and for that reason his sisters sent word to Jesus that his friend was sick. Notice that they did not send a request for Jesus to come. They simply said “*Lord, the one you love is sick.*” John 11:3b. There was urgency in the words. Why would they send a message except that it was serious? And why would they not expect Jesus to come. It was assumed. It is what you do or friends. It is what you expect of God.
- But Jesus waited and there are several reasons why. One is definitely that we cannot tell God what to do. We might think we know best, and we might think we can tell God what to think, but when we get backed into a corner by a predicament we realize how limited we are. God is not limited. Not at all. So, even when we think he should be acting, he will choose the time and the place to do his work.
- In other words, Jesus waited because it was on God’s time table and no one else’s. We would do well to remember this. I mean, how often do we rush to bring a solution to a crisis because we think we’re indispensable? We need to learn to wait and not rush in before God’s Spirit has had time to work.
- But the biggest reason Jesus waited is given in verse 4 when Jesus tells his puzzled disciples, “*This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.*” John 11:4. In other words Lazarus’s illness and death are going to have a higher purpose. Now how in the world can that be?! How can suffering glorify God? One of the most wrenching things anyone can do, least of all, a parent, is to watch a loved one wither away and die from a terminal illness. How can it be good?! I have no answer for that. Know why? I’m not God! But God has a purpose.
- But this I know, sickness even enters homes where Jesus is Lord. We don’t get passed over because we’re his followers. F. B Meyer, who had his share of grief tells us that this is often to show God’s power. (Share about this in our family). Meyer goes on to say. “*See to it that Christ is glorified even in our illness and human frailty.*”
- I don’t have time to delve into it here, but read 2 Corinthians 12:1-9 and see how illness can be a cause for God to be glorified. There Paul describes how he has suffered with some kind of serious condition or illness that has, in his mind, been seriously detrimental. We have no idea what it was, but in the end Paul professes, that God’s word to him concerning it was, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.* 2 Corinthians 12:9. In other words, illness and struggle can be cause for the glory of God.
- So Jesus lingered a couple extra days because of his love for this family. He waited until the worse could become the worst. He waited until his friend Lazarus was good and dead! Because . . .

Jesus was on an errand to conquer death

- As Jesus crossed the muddy Jordan River with his reluctant disciples, little did they know how accurate Thomas’s fatalistic words were. And this is because Jesus was on his way to his own death. The triumphal Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem was probably just days away.
- I’ve purposely not included the actual raising of Lazarus that comes all the way down in verses 43 – 44 because my point is answering the question why Jesus waited. Jesus was on a mission to show how what happens in this world is not the final word. He was on a mission to show that he was all about the death of death. Indeed his own death, which caused levels of hopelessness never plumbed for his followers, would be the ultimate glory for God. His mission, and why he waited was to show that God has the final word, not death.
- So, his disciples and soon the sisters too, would be witnessing the power of the resurrection.

Conclusion: And we do too – and that’s why Jesus waited. Amen.