

Lent 5 4/2/17
John 11:17-27, 38-53 A

When Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, He said to the Jews gathered there for the Feast, “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30). In other words, “I’m God.” Which He is, but the Jews didn’t like that very much. They thought Jesus was a blasphemer, so they picked up stones to stone Him to death.

But, Jesus, being Jesus, escaped and went to the other side of the Jordan to the area where John the Baptist had been baptizing. And when He was there, word came to Him from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus was ill. Ill – as in on-his-death-bed ill. “Get here as soon as you can” -- ill. But, Jesus, being Jesus, stayed two days longer in the place where He was.

Which brings up the question: is that the way friends act toward one another? Mary and Martha and Lazarus and Jesus were very good friends. You may recall that time Jesus had dinner at their home. Martha was so busy making arrangements for a wonderful dinner, that Jesus looked at her in friendship and love and said, “Martha, there’s only one thing needful.” Mary had chosen that one thing needful. Mary was one who had anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. When it comes to Lazarus, all the sisters had to say was, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

That’s their friendship. That’s the love they have for one another. So, this whole business of waiting two days – what’s that all about? Is this how friends treat one another? Is that how friends show love for one another? I would say not.

When friends find out someone they love is on their deathbed, they pack their bags, board the dog, and off they go to say that last good-bye.

That's what friends do. But, not Jesus. Typical, isn't it? Ya, you heard me. Isn't it typical of Jesus NOT to show up exactly when He's needed?

Honestly, you know how it is, right? You've got a problem. It doesn't have to be on the level of Lazarus-is-dying-type problem. But, you've got a problem, a thorn in the flesh. So, what do you do about it? You do what Mary and Martha did – you take it to Jesus. Take it to the Lord in prayer. You lay it all out before Him, expecting Him to act RIGHT AWAY. But so often, He doesn't act right away.

He waits. For Mary and Martha, he waited two days. He could say He was more than a day later and a dollar short. He was more like four days and a funeral late.

And the sisters, they told Him He was late when He finally got around to showing up. Both of them, independently of the other, told Jesus, "if you have been here, my brother would not have died." Even the Jews, who came to grieve with the sisters and support them, brought that up as well, "Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying" (v. 37)?

That's what they said. You ever say anything like that to Jesus? What about that time you said, "Lord, if you had been here, my Mom, my Dad, my Brother, would not have died ... Lord, if you had been here, my children would not have abandoned the faith which they confessed at their confirmation ... Lord, if you had been here, my relationship with my spouse would not have gone south ... So, Lord, why weren't you here?"

Well, some people would say there's a very good reason Jesus was not in Bethany with Mary and Martha. The disciples would be those kinds of people. When Jesus said, "Let's us go to Judea again," the disciples responded, "Dude, are you crazy? We were just there and the Jews

wanted to stone you to death and now you want to go back?” The disciples were afraid Jesus would be killed, but Jesus knew no such fear.

He told them this, “Are not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (9-10). Jesus is saying there is only one time-table by which He is going to work and that time-table is the one God the Father has set for Him. And no one is going to take His life from Him until He decides the time is right to lay it down.

He’s also telling them that He is the light of the world. His enemies are the ones stumbling around in the darkness. And because He is the light of the world, whoever is in Him is safe. They are safe, because Jesus knows exactly what He’s doing. And you know what He’s doing – He waiting around two days to go help His friend. Why does He do that?

Here’s the reason: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (v. 5). “Loved,” and love waits. Love was the reason Jesus waited two days to go to see Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Love is so designed to make Mary and Martha and you believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life and He works all things together for good for you.

Look at the way love waits. Jesus shows up at Lazarus’ tomb and prays, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me” (v. 41b-42). The Father sent Jesus into the world to conquer death. And, He who is the resurrection and the life, waits. He waits until Lazarus is good and dead before He acts. By raising Him from the dead, people will believe He is the resurrection and the life. That’s why He waits before He acts. And boy, when Jesus acts, He acts. He

goes to the tomb, tells them to roll the stone away, and prays the prayer we just heard, and says, “Lazarus, come out” (v. 43). And, what happens? Lazarus comes out from the grave, alive. And the Evangelist tells us, “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in Him” (v. 45). They came to believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life. They came to believe that He can do all things, even when His love makes Him wait.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some went and told the Pharisees all about. And the Pharisees got together the Council and concluded Jesus had to go.

So, when the fullness of time had come, Jesus allowed Himself to be betrayed, arrested, mocked, flogged, crowned with thorns, and crucified on a tree. He did that so He can conquer the very thing that caused death itself – namely, your sin. Your sin of pride, arrogance, your unbelief and doubt that causes you to say, “Jesus, you’re not doing a very good job of taking care of me, if you had been here, things would have turned out better. Jesus, you need to do things according to my time-table.” Those are the sins Jesus went to the cross for. And all that suffering, all that time nailed to the cross, all that death is for you, so that you are forgiven all yours sins.

You believe that. You believe it because in and through the waters of Holy Baptism you are joined to Him who is the resurrection and the life. You died with Him and rose with Him, and received the life and salvation that Jesus gives.

Living in Him who is the resurrection and the life gives you hope at all times and in all circumstances that Jesus will act on your behalf and for your good. Look at His promise, “I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (v. 25-26).

That day is coming when you will find yourself like Lazarus. Your eternal soul will depart your body and your mortal flesh will return to the dust from which it came. But, because you believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life, you know that is a very temporary condition. Your soul will rest with Jesus in heaven, waiting for the day of the resurrection of all flesh to come. When that glorious day comes, you will hear those same words Jesus spoke to Lazarus, and your body will come out of the dust in resurrected glory to be reunited with your soul, and you will be with Jesus forever.

I call that to your attention, Dear Child of God, because you believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life, who has conquered your greatest enemy – death itself. And you know that if Jesus did that for you, He will act for your good in the small, everyday burdens and worries of earthly life that trouble you this day.

To God be the Glory. Amen.