

I have observed that around here, at the death of a loved one, often if it is sudden, emergency services are called in an attempt to save the life of our loved one. When the death is expected, even prayed for, it is not as shocking, but not necessarily less difficult. Upon death, a path is laid out for the survivors. There are questions with very limited choices for answers. Ordinarily, the body goes to the funeral home and this is done with great care and respect. An initial decision is made in regards to what to do with the body, and a meeting is arranged for the next day or in the next couple days to meet about "arrangements." Initial questions concerning what church or pastor to call are answered so they also can be at the meeting.

At the meeting a longer list of questions is presented. They are questions that are necessary but some just come as a surprise – if it is a casket, what will they be dressed in, if an urn, what type, crafting an obituary, day, time of visitation, funeral, and the list goes on, all the while the loved ones grieve trying to work through the decisions for the funeral. While that is our current New Ulmian context, no doubt in Bethany 2000 years ago, Martha and Mary experienced a similar path when their brother Lazarus died. Jesus, the ultimate emergency service, was called to help while there might still have been time to save Lazarus' life, but he didn't come or arrive until Lazarus' body had been in the tomb four days. Jesus' timing and actions surprise us and even in this dark and mournful moment, Jesus reveals that all of this was for God's glory, and revealing it.

"Believe and See the Glory of God."

"On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. 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?" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." ... "Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone" he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "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." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go" (John 11:17-27, 38-45 NIV 2011).

When Jesus got there, the sisters had been waiting and no doubt wondering. Martha showed by her great confession that they believed in Jesus and trusted that he is *"the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."* Jesus had turned water into wine in front of his disciples. He healed many. He even sent word that the Centurion's servant was healed without even going all the way there. And the Centurion's servant was healed. But here he sent no word. He didn't start heading for Bethany until a couple days after hearing their request. He loved them. They were his friends.

"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." Martha believed in Jesus. She knew her brother Lazarus would rise in the resurrection. She knew Jesus could handle her grief and her words and maybe some disappointment. He loved her and Mary and Lazarus. This is true of you too. Jesus loves you. You believe in him. He can handle your words, your prayers, your frustrations, all of it. And if we don't know what to ask for, God knows better than we do.

Do we underestimate Jesus? Yes. How can we not? We are sinners tempted by our sinful flesh, sometimes blinded by our sinful wants, desires, or grief to bring Jesus down to our level in our minds and if we don't get what we want, like a youth in a huff we conclude, "Well then you don't love me, Jesus." Instead of trusting him or asking

him, we doubt him, his love, his promises. Sometimes we want something so badly that we know is wrong or we feel God won't give us and so we sinfully go about getting what we want, even trying to hide it from Jesus, or boldly doing it thinking, "it's wrong, but I'm going to do it anyways. I don't trust Jesus for another way, or that his way is best." The sinful nature is so deceptive. It always wants to bring Jesus down to a sinful level as though he thinks the way we do or is as petty and selfish as we are. We can't help but underestimate him. Martha does better, but still doesn't fully see. Jesus wants her to see the glory.

Jesus would show her the depth of these words and who he is when he said to her, *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."*

"Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 'Take away the stone,' he said. 'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.'" Thank you Martha! Jesus is always doing stuff like this – "fill those jars with water, take some to the master of the banquet," or "who touched me," he asks with the crowd pressing in on him, or as he tells the mother of the dead boy, "do not weep," he is always doing such strange, even bordering on crazy things. "Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

You can't talk sense into Jesus, or at least not our sense. He does this impossible thing. He is the impossible – God and Man in the person of Jesus Christ. Now see what this means for the dead stinking brother of Marth and Mary, *"So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "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." When he said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"*

"The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." This is who Jesus is. He is the Resurrection and the Life – then, now, and eternally. He can heal someone before they die and prevent death. He can raise someone who has just died, like he did with the widow's son at Nain, or he did through Elisha the prophet, and he can raise a dead decomposing body back to life to truly live. He does that and he can keep every promise he makes.

But maybe you can't see his Glory. Maybe the temptation seems too strong. Maybe it's the anxiety in worry that has us looking at our belly buttons instead of looking up at Jesus praying to his father and calling to the dead man. Maybe our doubt wants us to close our ears and think that can't be true, or maybe that it is not true for me because I'm such a sinner. I don't deserve that.

And so Jesus says to you and me, *"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"* See the glory of God shine as Jesus, the very Son of God in the flesh, proves to you and to me so much here.

So many things are now proven – Jesus sometimes acts so strangely in our lives, at least strangely to us – letting us run out of wine at a party, letting loved ones around us die, or allowing disease and pain to touch us. But he has a plan for all this, and he knows the end game with all of this. Jesus isn't ignorant of your struggle, or your pain, or even death. Look at who he is – God in the flesh. So many were terrified of Lazarus' death and overcome with grief. But Jesus raised him from the dead by his word. Why? For you, and for Lazarus too of course, but for you and all those gathered that they put their trust in Jesus even when he doesn't seem to be there, or he seems delayed four days. Trust him.

The apostle Paul expected you and me to grieve at the death of our loved ones, but he points out that Christians are different than unbelievers when it comes to death. We grieve with hope, *"you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus..."* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). Jesus gives us reason for certainty. **See his glory.**

Stand in awe as you come to God's house these next few weeks and ponder anew that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead only to then walk to his own death for you – resolutely set out, set his face like flint, to pay the debt of our doubt, of our pettiness, or our unforgiving spirit, of our guilt, shame and sin. He suffered the eternal death we deserved so that not even physical death can separate us from his love. It couldn't hold Lazarus. It won't hold our bodies either. Believe in Jesus. Follow him. He's not an insurance policy to keep forgotten away in a drawer. He is your life now = your purpose, your comforter, your closest friend, your forgiveness for every sin and your reason and help to stand strong against temptation, even death. He is your God, your Savior, the reason you get up in the morning – you belong to him, no one loves you more. Marvel at his glory. **Believe and see the Glory of God. Amen.**