

Wesley United Methodist Church

April 6, 2014

"The Other Side of Faith."

John 11:1-45

Doctors are so busy nowadays. More and more of them are running their practices like an assembly line. Doc Blakely tells about a fellow who walked into a doctor's office and the receptionist asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." She took down his name, address, medical insurance number and told him to have a seat. Fifteen minutes later a nurse's aide came out and asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." So she took down his height, weight, a complete medical history and told him to wait in an examining room. A half-hour later a nurse came in and asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." So she gave him a blood test, blood pressure test, an EKG, told him to take off all his clothes, and wait for the doctor. An hour later the doctor came in and asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." The doctor said, "Where?" He said, "Outside on the truck. Where do you want them?" I'm sure doctors are used to being kidded just as pastors are.

You know the story of Lazarus and his sisters. Lazarus and Mary and Martha were among Jesus' closest friends... Jesus stayed in their home and ate meals with them...So when it was obvious that Lazarus was seriously ill and showed no signs of getting better, the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death...no, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved the three friends...yet, notice this, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, "he stayed where he was two more days."

That one sentence would make a good sermon...God's time table is not our time table...how many times have you prayed that Jesus would come and heal a loved one...and Jesus has lingered somewhere far off...and all you were left with was silence? That's what faith is all about...believing in God and God's providence during the times when God seems absent...if we knew that God would heed our every wish, that would not be faith...that would be something else.

Jesus lingered where he was. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea"...the disciples were opposed to that idea...It was already becoming dangerous for Jesus in Judea, but he would not be deterred. "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep," he said.

This is the other side of faith...we will not forever feel forsaken. Christ may linger in another place for a long time, or so it seems...but his absence is temporary...he has not forgotten us.

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. The fact that Lazarus was in the grave that long may be significant. There were some of the Jews who believed that you should return to the grave for the purposes of mourning for three days after your loved one's death because the soul of that person was thought to stay around the body for three days...after three days according to this tradition, the soul of the dead person would depart...four days may have been the statement by Jesus that Lazarus really was dead...there was no life in him.

It's one thing for people to be revived through CPR or other resuscitation...that happens more often...It is quite another for a person to be decomposing in the grave for four days and be brought back to life as Lazarus did.

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." Then she adds these words, "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Martha was a person of extraordinary faith. Those of you who remember the story of Mary and Martha as told in Luke 10, remember that it was Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha ran around doing household chores...Jesus scolded Martha and praised Mary...yet this story of the raising of their brother Lazarus tells us that Martha probably had the more mature faith. 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 answered, "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?" "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" was Martha's answer.

And after she had said this she went back and called her sister Mary aside and told her that Jesus had arrived...Mary got up and went to him. Her words also were, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and those who were with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" "Come and see, Lord." Jesus wept. We love that verse, don't we? it saved our daughters when they were asked to recite a Bible verse. "Jesus wept"--the shortest verse in the Bible...but it is also one of the most powerful...Jesus wept...real tears...Jesus was human...he cares...he enters our pain...feels our suffering...experiences our joy.

The friends that were standing around said, "See how he loved him!" But some said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus came to the tomb and asked them to remove the stone, "Take away the stone." Another powerful sentence...Martha said, "but Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then there is Jesus' answer, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone...Jesus looked up to heaven 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." So they took away the stone and Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." You know if Jesus hadn't limited that command to Lazarus, every corpse in that graveyard would have come forth. Lazarus came out his body wrapped in strips of linen, and a cloth around his head...Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave cloths and let him go."

What an amazing story...after four days in the tomb, Jesus raised a dead man from the grave...but here is the important thing I need to say...do you understand that this your story and mine? We are not one of the bystanders...we are not Mary and Martha...we are Lazarus, and you and I are called to new life.

This story affirms the idea of resurrection...that's important, of course. You and I have this to look forward to...the dead in Christ will rise...we will live beyond the grave with Christ and with those we love.

Dr. A. L. Jenkins was an emergency-room Doctor for 48 years in Knoxville TN. In this capacity he saw the best and the worst in the field of medicine. He tells the most memorable story in his medical career...about a man who came in dead on arrival. His policy is to attempt resuscitation anyway...after about 10 minutes of CPR, the man began to show signs of life...the man sat up, looked around him, then said to Dr. Jenkins, "Oh, I wish I was still out there! It was beautiful!" The man would never explain what he meant, but would repeat these words.

The story of Lazarus can be our story. We, too, can be turned loose, untied. This is hope for the ones who are addicted to any kind of unhealthy substance...unsavory habits...living a meaningless, empty life...for the tired and hurting...the person at their wit's end...it's good news for all of us. There is life beyond the grave. It is a story that gives us hope for everyday living. It is a word of encouragement for anyone who needs to make a new beginning in life.

The story of the raising of Lazarus ends with these words, "Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him."

How about you? Have you really put your faith in him? Do you trust him? Are you willing to turn your life over to his guidance, his direction? If so, accept his invitation to come to his table and share in the bread and the cup that he offers to all.