

Pastor Melinda VanderSys
Cell (906) 291-0897
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Newberry, MI
First Presbyterian Church, Newberry MI
Faith Lutheran Church, Sault Ste. Marie, MI

Sunday, March 29, 2020
Fifth Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Almighty God, Your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of Your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve You in righteousness all our days. Take away the fear and anxiousness we have. Fill us with courage and strength to face the days ahead; loving, living and serving, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(portions from the Fifth Sunday in Lent, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Readings and Psalm

- *Ezekiel 37:1-14* *The dry bones of Israel brought to life*
- *Psalm 130* *I wait for you, O Lord; in Your word is my hope.*
- *Romans 8:6-11* *Life in the Spirit*
- *John 11:1-45* *The raising of Lazarus*

The Holy Gospel according to John 11:1-45, NRSV

(<https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#texts>)

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” 8The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” 9Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” 11After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” 12The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them

about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” 23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

28When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

45Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.
The Gospel of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on this Fifth Sunday in Lent. Amen.

What a whirlwind we have experienced over these past couple of weeks. In the church – and in the community – many have worked tirelessly to keep things moving.

We know there is an urgency; an urgency to help to get food to the kids and families in our community; an urgency to be sure our jobs are secure during this time or an urgency to fill out unemployment paperwork so that we are able to continue to afford for our necessities; an urgency to check in on our families, our friends, and our neighbors; and an urgency to make sure we, ourselves, aren't hoarding but have enough food and essentials in case further restrictions are necessarily imposed on us.

I feel I am living with a sense of urgency every day. And while I try to remain calm when I speak to others or express a sense of peace in the words I use for the many, many emails I've been sending out, I know there is a bit of anxiousness, of uncertainty, in my whole being.

In our gospel reading for today from John, Mary and Martha feel that urgency. Their brother, Lazarus, is ill. They sent a message to Jesus. They expected him to come right away. They loved Jesus and they knew Jesus loved them just as much.

Yet Jesus didn't respond with that same urgency. He intentionally waited. He deliberately delayed going. He didn't rush to be with the family, to be by Lazarus' bedside, to be offering words of comfort and strength. In fact, he stayed away two days longer, finally saying, ok, it's time to go see Lazarus.

Isn't that strange? Jesus, the Son of God, who healed *the blind, the lame and the paralyzed*; who performed miracles *for others* by feeding five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish; who walked on water; who turned water into wine *for guests* at a wedding banquet. This kind, compassionate Jesus, took His sweet ole' time going to see one of His best friends.

And when He got to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Lazarus was already dead. Not only dead, he had already been in the tomb four days.

Met with cries of grief, "'Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died,' and, I'm sure, 'why didn't you come quicker? We needed you!'", Jesus said, don't worry. "Lazarus will rise again."

Easy for Him to say! He just showed up on the scene and He took His time getting there!

When Jesus saw how distraught Mary and Martha and the crowd that gathered were, Jesus wept.

He wept because they were weeping. They were His friends, His family. He felt their pain and anguish.

He wept because of their lack of faith. The disciples had reminded Jesus that the last time He was in Judea He was almost stoned to death. They were living in fear, not faith.

He wept because He knew His death was coming soon. He knew that He would die and, like Lazarus, also be placed in a tomb. And even though He knew of His resurrection to come, there was still an extremely difficult path lying ahead for Him.

Yes, Jesus wept.

But then Jesus demanded that the stone be rolled away. And then He cried out, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out. He was risen from the dead – a preface of what awaited Jesus Himself.

We are living in a time of urgency. We need more masks and respirators and medical equipment. We need a vaccine to prevent the novel coronavirus from spreading even further. We need a cure. This is urgent. There is no time to wait.

And so, we cry out: to the government, to the local health department and hospitals and other agencies, to our families, and to ourselves. And we cry out to God.

Where is God in our cries of urgency for relief of pain and anxiousness, of fear and death? Will there be another delay, such as in Jesus' delaying to see Lazarus?

My faith tells me no. God is always with us. God is with us in our good health and in our illness. God is with us through times of good and times of not-so-good. God is with us through times of peace and times of war. And God is with us in life and in death.

Most importantly, God is working even through this pandemic.

And so, during this time when we cannot gather in our churches to worship, to pray, to hug, to be present for one another in the presence of Almighty God, we are still together in spirit.

We are Sisters and Brothers in Christ. Nothing – not one person, not one thing - can change that. As we hear in Romans 8:38-39, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Not even the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

I continue to pray for you and I ask that you continue to pray for me. May you find Peace+ in Christ today and always. Amen.

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

God of life, bind Your faithful people into one body. Enliven the church with Your Spirit and bless the work of those who work for its renewal. Accomplish Your work of salvation in us and through us. We especially pray today for those affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Heal, where healing is possible; bring comfort for those in pain; and may the gift eternal life be upon those who have walked on. You weep with those who grieve. Unbind all who are held captive by anxiety, despair, or pain, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time.....(please lift up in prayer your concerns). Fill us with compassion and empathy for those who struggle, and keep us faithful in prayer; we pray this in the name of Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(prayers from the Fifth Sunday in Lent, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive

those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to serve our Lord! Thanks be to God!