

Sermon John 11 1 45 5th S in Lent

Sermon: 5th Sunday in Lent

Text: John 11:17-27; 38-53

Theme; Facing death – with Jesus

Goal: Death is not the end, but a stage to an upper level with Jesus.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: How many times have you faced death in your family? Maybe your parents have passed away, - or your grandparents, or a nephew, or a cousin...

It is a hard and painful time. The closer our relationship with the beloved one who passed away was, the more difficult it is to overcome the sorrow. In some cases we mourn all our life, as Jacob confessed when he lost his son Joseph and refused to be comforted. He said: “In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.” And the Bible says: “So his father wept for him.”

I – Mary and Martha faced death

Mary and Martha faced death when their brother Lazarus died. It was not a sudden death. Lazarus fell ill and it was time to call Jesus, their good friend. Jesus had healed so many people. He would heal his good friend Lazarus as well, - this was the hope of the sisters.

The prayer they offered to Jesus is an exemplary prayer. They didn't command Jesus what to do. They just said: “Lord, the one you love is sick.” The time of sickness of a beloved one is a hard time too. It feels like we are in the waiting room, in the line, to pass the door of life. Sometimes the sickness prepares us for the departure. We pray more often than normally. We come closer to our beloved one. The doctors try to do their best and many times they solve the problem. But once the

time of departure will come.

Intentionally Jesus didn't go to the house of Lazarus immediately. He stayed where He was for some more days. – Jesus' time is not our time. He knows the best time, even when we become impatient and nervous. He knows how to handle us and he knows the purpose of that sickness.

Lazarus had died before Jesus arrived. Jesus was aware of what was happening. He said: “This sickness is for God's glory so that God may be glorified through it... let us go to him... so that you may believe.” - It was a test of faith to the sisters and to the disciples, a hard test of faith! - Do we realize when God is testing us???

Mary and Martha buried their brother in a cave, with all the rituals in use of that time. Four days had passed since Lazarus was buried when Jesus arrived in the village. Many Jews from Jerusalem were there, comforting the sisters. The sisters were still mourning and they complained to Jesus when he arrived: “If you had been here, my brother would not have died!” Martha said this to Jesus, and when Mary came she said the same words. - How many times had they been repeating to each other these words: “If Jesus had been here, our brother would not have died...”

If... if... In this story there are no “ifs”. The story has facts, concrete facts, always; not just that story, but any story. What can we do now? Facing death, nothing more. We are weak and unable to do anything when we face death... even when we come to our last hour.

But then we need to cling to Jesus and to confess like Martha: “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” - Therefore we pray “in the name of Jesus”, because God hears the intercession of His Son. His answer to our requests and complaints is always: YES... NO...WAIT! - In the case of Martha and Mary, the answer was YES. Martha believed that her brother would “rise again in the resurrection at the last day”; but she got her brother back alive on that same day! - For

us, in such a case, the answer of God is: WAIT, and believe like Martha believed in the resurrection at the last day. This is our hope about our beloved ones and about ourselves.

The sisters Mary and Martha faced death as anyone faces; but with a big difference: **looking to Jesus!** And they were not disappointed in their faith. They got, in anticipation, their brother back to life again.

II – Jesus faced death

Jesus is sympathetic to our suffering. He comes to us in our suffering and He suffers with us. He wept with Martha and Mary, in spite of the assurance that Lazarus would rise again from the death! He listens to our cry and complaints, and comforts us. He is not far when we are suffering. The words He said to Martha re-echoes in our ears till now: “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.” And the same question is directed to us: “Do you believe this?” - “Yes, Lord, I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

Hebrew 4:14-16 says: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Yes indeed, Jesus is sympathetic to our suffering when we face death because He Himself faced His own death on the cross. The resurrection of Lazarus was the last straw for the leaders of the Jews to decide to kill Jesus. They couldn’t support that miraculous man any more! He must die! He was too strong and powerful for them.

And so they did. Some weeks later Jesus was put to death on the cross by the leaders of the Jews. But we know that this was not only a revenge

of His enemies, but this was God's plan to free us from eternal death. Jesus faced death on our behalf to give us life, eternal life! Any one who believes in Him has His life! This is His promise and we cannot have doubts about it! As we celebrate the Lent Season, we can see the empty tomb beyond the cross, we can see in Jesus' death His resurrection and our resurrection as well! Jesus faced and endured eternal death for us so that we should not fear eternal death anymore but have eternal life!

Conclusion:

The first time I faced death in my family was when my father died. I was 22 years old and was just beginning my ministry. Lídia and I went from our mission to my parents place to baptize a niece and to attend my father's retirement service. He was 65 years old. The Monday night following these two events, he woke up and said to my mother: “Jesus ruft mich. Bet mit mir! - Jesus calls me. Pray with me.” - The first reaction of my mother was NO! But he said again: Pray with me. And she prayed and sang with him. - I went into their room and asked him: Are you prepared, father? He answered: Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit das ist mein Schmuck und Ehrenkleid... - Jesus' blood and righteousness, are my beauty and my glorious dress... He couldn't finish the verse: Damit will ich vor Gott bestehen, when ich zum Himmel werd eingehen. - With them will I stand before God when I in heaven will enter. - He died smiling. It was a sudden, fatal heart attack. I “saw” the faith.

In the resurrection of Jesus we see light at the end of the tunnel where non-Christians do not see any light. We weep, we mourn, we miss, - but with hope in Jesus. He is the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Him will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Him will never die. This is His promise. This is our faith! Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle.
Cape Town, 10th April 2011