



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Palm Sunday

April 9, 2017

Watch Out!

John 12:12-19

The words of Charles Wesley become for us a prayer to set us into the path of Holy Week with Jesus and with one another---

“Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav’n to earth to earth come down!
Fix in us they humble dwelling,
all they faithful mercies crown.
Jesus thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter ev’ry trembling heart.”

Please find the insert in your bulletin with the extended reading from John’s Gospel...It is different from the Palm Sunday accounts in the first three gospels. Writing around 90 CE/AD, [some 60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus]; he uses sources different than the synoptic gospels; his seldom appears in the readings for this day.

Yet, for our purposes today, it conveys a deeper context in which Lazarus’ death and resurrection seem to be a tipping point to Calvary. A brief review:

- Bethany was two miles from Jerusalem;
- Jesus often went to the holy city for worship;
- The home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus was a place of hospitality (a B-and-B☺) where Jesus found friendship and loving support;
- Lazarus falls ill; Jesus is messaged that he is needed; he waits four days; word comes that his beloved friend has died;
- He arrives to find the sisters with one statement: “Lord, if you had been here....”
- Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Martha believes. (Spoiler Alert: Belief, confident faith/trust is the key!)
- Jesus grieves, weeps, at the tomb, the words: “Lazarus, come out.” Pure command with the additional words “Unbind him and let him go home.”

That account has been a source of rich conversation for those who heard or read last Sunday's sermon: Did it happen? What were Lazarus' first words? What did the sisters do? Were the crowds moved? What about the authorities? What became of Lazarus? One said that he would have to die again!

Check your insert...Lazarus became a magnet point for belief and controversy! A brief review:

- Many believed!
- Some reacted in fear and went to the religious council. "If the sign's up everyone/EVERYONE will believe, and the Romans will destroy our temple and our nation." Political consequences drive the growing storms of danger. "So from that day on they planned to put (Jesus) to death." Jesus and the 12 scrambled as an arrest warrant is filed!

But, wait, out Bethany way, there was a party. Lazarus probably said, "It's about time!" Of course, Martha served, again!

A moment of deep blessing...Mary at Jesus' feet again with an anointing of very pricy perfume... anointed and wiped his feet as a moment;

- ✠ A moment of deep conflict...Judas chirps "300 denarii could have helped many poor." [A denarii, a days' pay, likely worth \$50. --- \$15,000>good perfume, sweet fragrance.]

A moment of deep teaching...Jesus says "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of her burial."

- ✠ And we learn that Judas, the treasurer could not have survived an audit, a thief and, by the way, "the one who was about to betray him."

Then, the crowds engulfed the home in Bethany to see Jesus, but they "also came to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead." But, the warning still "Watch Out!" But, more so, wait, watch, walk with Him!

Beloved in Christ, as we enter Holy Week, move with Jesus to that Upper Room of teaching and meal, to the harsh days of trials for Jesus, his scourging, mocking, carrying the instrument of His death to a garbage fill outside the walls of city, these are the grace nuggets to carry with us:

- Jesus is God's own way into the way, the truth, the life; forgiveness and reconciliation is assured in the one who builds us in love and sends us in peace;
- As Jesus loved the "Bethany 3", His love is for us from Cross to Empty Tomb to the very place where our Creator is forever. Cross is key; death is met and conquered. What to see what it looks like? Remember Lazarus!
- There is an embed in this long Gospel that is just stunning. Joseph Caiaphas, high priest, the guy in charge; son in law of Annas, the former high priest...both will have a place in these early moments, Caiaphas will ultimately send Jesus to Pontius Pilate. Later in Acts, he would question Peter and Paul about their healing of a cripple and send them off saying that word of the miracle had spread so far they could not stop them.
- But, here is the embedded "aha." First paragraph. Wringing their hands and their hearts, the religious authorities are concerned that if THEY don't stop him "everyone will believe in Him."
- So Caiaphas says: "You all know nothing! You do not understand that it is better for you to have ONE MAN DIE FOR THE PEOPLE THAN TO HAVE THE WHOLE NATION DESTROYED." Therefore, in other words, to say in effect that "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world that whoever believe in him shall never perish." Death swallowed up in victory.
- So the chief priests "planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of were deserting and BELIEVING IN JESUS."

Lent. Preparing and repented; Praying and trusting that in our Pilgrimage of Life, surveying the wondrous Cross, we have learned this much: life is all about believing in Jesus...walking in His way...seeking and trusting the guidance of the Holy Spirit...placed in complete trust and obedience in the One who kept teaching his disciples to be DiscipleFit to the end of His days; that their days might be rooted in the promise of the One who called them and said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and those who live and believe in me will never die."

Recall that His own did not understand all that Jesus taught, a little like each one of us in our lives, until he was glorified, with God forever, and then "they remembered."

In these next days, I believe we are called to answer the question to Martha, "Do you believe this?"

And to answer with her: "LORD, I BELIEVE." For as the religious leaders said to one another: "You see, WE can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

May the words of Charles Wesley be as a prayer to guide us forward to the end of our days:

"Finish then the thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast out crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Lazarus was a tipping point! Death will stare Jesus in the face and He will forever be the VICTORY!

The question is ours too: "Do you believe this?"

In Jesus' name, let it be, Amen!