

SERMON

Death, Illness, Disease, Covid-19 – Is There Any Hope?

Pastor Jim

Today, we continue to shelter in our homes. None of us want to contract the Covid-19 virus. No longer is the virus something that is “over there.” It is among us. It is here in our community and we have to take the proper precautions. Just like any other virus, Covid-19 is nothing new. Pestilence, the plague, sickness, illness, cancer, and death are all symptoms of life in a fallen and sinful world. Eventually, we all have to face a stark reality. Life is fleeting and death is real. The questions arise: Is there any hope? What’s the “good news” of God for us? What does the Gospel have to say to us in our day?

Today we turn to the resurrection of Lazarus. You know the story. Mary and Martha were some of Jesus’ closest friends. They lived in the town of Bethany. They send word to Jesus that their brother, Lazarus, was ill and near death. They pleaded for Jesus to come heal their brother before it was too late; but death came for Lazarus and he died.

By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four (4) days. Upon hearing that Jesus was near, Martha went out to meet Him and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will do for you” (John 11:21-22).

As Jesus arrives, the family and friends are all gathered together. Their sorrow is immense. They were crying, weeping, and mourning at the loss of Lazarus. The heart of Jesus went out to them. John even writes in verse 35, “*Jesus wept.*” Those words form the shortest verse in all of the Bible and perhaps, one of the most meaningful.

A newly ordained pastor was asked to celebrate Holy Communion at a nearby church. This pastor had never served communion in this particular church and he assumed that the communion service would be printed in the bulletin for him to read. When the time came for Holy Communion, the young pastor read the Invitation to Communion, the Prayer of Confession, and the Prayer of Consecration.

What he did not know was a custom of the church. Just before the people came forward to the altar, the minister would say, “*Hear these words of comfort from the Holy Scriptures*” and he would recite an appropriate passage or verse from memory. When the young pastor read the words, “*Hear these words of comfort from the Holy Scriptures*” – he panicked! There was a long pause. Every eye was fixed on the pastor. In complete embarrassment and fear the young pastor recited the only verse that came to his mind, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

The pastor felt awful. He knew he had botched the communion service. Then, after the service, a member walked up to him and said, “Pastor, when you quoted that verse, ‘Jesus wept,’ that was so meaningful. For the first time I realized that Jesus really does understand my pain.

He really does love me and He cares for me. He truly understands my struggles. I learned today that Jesus does identify with me like He identified with His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.”

The questions arise: Is there any hope? What’s the “good news” of God for us? Yes, there is hope and there is much more than hope. Hope has a reality, a human face and a divine face, Jesus Christ the Son of God identifies with you! And because of Him, you and I can, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

As you and I face difficulties in life – suffering, trials, temptations, and tribulations, the realities of a fallen, broken, and sinful world, we learn from the Word of God that we are never alone! Jesus is always with us and He always cares for us!

John continues, “Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Jesus was a respected Rabbi on earth but He never officiated at a funeral. Now, let those words sink in for moment. John tells us that Jesus attended wedding, turned water into wine, and people said, “This is some fine wine!” But, as a Rabbi, a pastor, Jesus never officiated at a funeral, only resurrections!

Is there any hope? There is hope in Jesus our Saivour. He calls you and me by name. He sets us free from sin and those things that bind us. He and gives us new life – the old things pass away; everything becomes new in Christ. He forgives us of all our sins – past, present, and future He accepts us as His very own – not because we are perfect but because He is perfect

Paul wrote concerning this “good news” – “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

Is there any hope? Yes, there most certainly is hope. God is still on the throne. He is still in control. He is in the same place He was when His Son died for our sins. He has called us to Himself and He has promised He will never let us go! He will never leave us nor forsake us!

The Psalmist encourages us in our day with his words: “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning more than watchmen for the morning.⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption” (Psalm 130:5-7). This is the “good news” of the Gospel of our LORD!” – Thanks be to God!!!