

SERMON. LENT 5. MARCH 29, 2020.
John 11: 1 - 45.

Since the Corona Virus has not reached its peak here in Calgary, Alberta, precautions about isolating ourselves has been sanctioned not by the Church alone but by our governments at the Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels.

So our schools , our community centres, clubs, and friendships groups have all been closed. This has made us realize the importance of having friends, of needing friends.

In the village of Bethany, Jesus had three close friends - the sisters, Martha and Mary, and their brother Lazarus. Their house remained opened to Jesus when many other houses were being closed against him.

When Lazarus got sick, it was only natural that the first one the two sisters should turn to for help was Jesus. They sent an urgent message to him, and said, "Lord, the man you love is ill." Their hope was that this message would pull at his heart strings, he would drop everything and come and cure him.

But surprisingly Jesus did not stop everything and rush to the bedside of his dying friend. Instead he stayed on where he was for two whole days. His delay in coming must have been heart breaking for the two sisters. While their brother lay dying, the one they believed could do something about it wasn't there.

Lazarus died. They buried him according to their tradition. The two sisters were devastated, but the Gospel shows us that it affected Mary more, because she would not leave the house.

They were very disappointed, that their good friend Jesus was absent. So when Jesus arrives, they let him know that His presence could have prevented this death. Mary said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

The desolation Mary and Martha experienced is one many of us have and are presently experiencing during this Corona Virus Pandemic.

When something bad happens to us or to one of our loved one, we can't help thinking that if only God really cared about us, if he really loved us, then he would not have allowed this thing to happen. We feel abandoned by God. We feel he has left us alone.

Jesus did not conceal his feelings. The Gospel makes this clear. He was moved with pity on seeing the plight of the ordinary people. He wept on the way to the tomb of Lazarus.

Martha poured out her sorrow in her hour of grief to Jesus. So can we. And when Jesus challenged her to believe, she made a profession of faith: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

What we have to do is turn to God. We have to go on praying, go on believing in God. Neither a good life, nor a close relationship with God, will necessarily save a person from death.

When we suffer it seems as though God is absent. But when we pray we realize God is not absent , but present in our suffering. God is with us as our hope in our , and our strength in weakness.

Death is the fate of all human beings. No one is spared, neither the sinner nor the righteous: we are all mortal and subject to physical death; we are all sinners and must deal with the implications of spiritual death; we are all subject to the consequences of social sins such as terrorism, violence, ecological exploitation and pandemics such as Corona.

The Gospel story shows Jesus as a faithful friend. It shows even in death we are not beyond the reach of his help. He did not leave Martha and Mary to grieve alone.

He came to them at the height of their grief, shared their sorrow, and gave them hope by announcing eternal life to those who believe in Him.

The question before us is: Will we choose life or death?
Will we choose our own
wilfulness or Jesus the Christ? Amen.

Let us lift our hearts and voices to the Lord in prayer, that He would be merciful to His people.

Blessed Lord, we live in a valley of deathly shadows. Thank you for Jesus, who calls us by name from our tombs. Help us to firmly believe that His is our resurrection, and our life.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Send your Holy Spirit to breathe new life into your church. Raise it up to be the living body of your dear Son in the world. Purify and bless it, so that through word and sacrament, and by deeds of mercy and forgiveness, it may share your life and grace with all who are held captive to sin, evil, and death. Breathe your gracious spirit into this congregation, so that our worship, words, deliberations, and deeds abound with the fruits of that spirit. Fill us with the life of Jesus and give us the will and the strength to share His life with everyone we meet.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Breathe your holy spirit upon your persecuted servants throughout the world. Revive their faith and knit them into an undying fellowship with Jesus and with one another. By their courageous witness and their patient suffering, glorify your name and turn many hearts to repentant faith.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Breathe your patient spirit into each of our hearts during this trying time. Fill us with grace and understanding while we are apart and give strength and protection to frontline workers as they work so hard to keep us safe.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Breathe your spirit of life and grace into all who are afflicted by sickness, sorrow, or adversity. Especially those affected by the Covid-19 virus. As Jesus raised up Lazarus from death, we beseech you, raise up these dear ones from the power of sin, evil, and death, and restore them to their loved ones.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Breathe your holy spirit into all who lead the nations, especially our own. Fill them with wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of you, their Lord, and joy in doing your will. Help them work for the welfare of their people. Breathe your gracious spirit into every heart so that hatred, violence, cruelty, and war ceases throughout the world.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Breathe your spirit into all who risk their lives to defend liberty and protect others. Keep them faithful, true, and bold. Shield and direct them in perilous situations. Raise and heal them when they fall, and deliver them into a place of safety when their task has ended.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Breathe your life-giving spirit upon all to whom death draws near. Grant them serenity, faith, and reconciliation with you and their loved ones. Especially we plead on behalf of those who die alone - abandoned, unloved or unnoticed. Bless them with the mercy and grace promised by your Son to any who will receive Him. Give a double portion of your spirit to hospice and palliative workers, and to all who care for the dying.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Most holy and gracious father, we thank you that you have called your faithful servants by name out of death and into life in Christ. Breathe your holy and life-giving spirit into us for we are still troubled by the powers of death, sin, and the devil. Give us the grace to comfort one another in times of sorrow and to encourage and help each other along life's road. Grant us faith to confess your Son as the resurrection and the life, the Christ, the one who has come into the world to bring eternal life to everyone who believes in Him.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Into your hands, gracious Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.