

OT- Ezekiel 37: 1-14 NT- John 11: 1-38

Sermon- “ I will weep when you are weeping”

“God’s Time is Best” is the name of a Bach chorale prelude that I used to play. God’s Time vs. our Time, God’s Time becoming our time? Linear time, linear thinking. This timing and our wanting control of it....that is the broader issue to examine today.

Jesus waits. I know, you were probably expecting me to preach a sermon on the shortest verse in the entire Bible, “Jesus wept”, but for me far more challenging is the idea that Jesus waited. We are not told **why** he waited several days to start the twenty-mile journey to Bethany when he gets a message to come NOW. Some have written that it was definitely because he wanted to be sure Lazarus was “good and dead” so that God’s glory might be shown. After

all, Jews believed that the spirit of a person lingers for three days after death. But, this does not sound like my sensitive Savior and Lord. Others say that Jesus wasn't thinking at all about Lazarus and only about the miracle he was about to perform and its effect on the Jewish people. This also does not ring true of this champion Listener who lived in the moment to the "nth" degree, giving all of his attention to who and what was at hand, the **opposite** of multi-tasking. Jesus **decides to wait** a few more days to go back to Judea, knowing that one of his best-loved friends is dying. Did Jesus, being fully God and fully man, know details of the future? Did he wake up in the morning, saying to himself, "Well, today I am going to just be a man and see where it takes me" or "My calendar tells me this a "fully God day". I will be omniscient today. But we **do know** that he had a clear knowledge-given to him by the

God who met him mornings on the mountain alone- of his **identity as the Son of God** and that this Son had to be raised up (on a cross) to die for the sins of the people, **and** that God would do the rest.

The lines of dialogue in this story, particularly those of Martha and Mary, have gut-wrenching connections to **our** reality two thousand years later—“Where **were** you God? If you had **been there**, this wouldn't have **happened!**” She needed to blame someone!

Timing is everything in our mortal minds. And this timing also holds the keys to our deepest fears: not enough time, or not enough time toearn enough money to.....help enough people...or provide enough for my family...or.....Timing. Our minds tend to gravitate towards what I call “scarcity thinking” in times of great fear and anguish, as if we somehow have some control over time and the future.

In Liberia, on the first night we were there, jet-lagged and wide-eyed, we were to be the “honored guests” of an evangelistic meeting way out in the bush, at a place where there were no security lights near the church, no electricity at all except for the flickering light bulb, powered by a growling generator. But from the car which “dropped us” to the church in the evening darkness. There was only tall grass, with a few narrow boards laid down in the sloppy mud and a tiny flashlight held by a little boy, shining ahead, not on the ground. I was terrified. All the “what ifs” came rushing back to me as I stepped gingerly from board to board, praying I would not mis-step into the tall grass where there was surely a Green mamba whose life ambition it was to scare or bite this trembling missionary woman. Fear gripped me.

Fear is also prevalent in the disciples as they tried to convince Jesus not to go back to Bethany. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, for the last time. As we catch up with him, Bethany morphs into a place of darkness for his disciples-- only two miles to the place where they knew their master was a wanted man, a heretic marked

for execution. The verdict was already in and they knew it. Jesus had been the subject of one failed stoning already. Thomas, in v. 16, mutters perhaps sarcastically, “We’ll, let’s all go with him so we can die, too”, when he realized that they **were** going there, like it or not, safe or not.

And where fear grips, it steadily gains territory. When they get to Bethany, death is all around. All the ingredients of a funeral are present: the Jewish tradition of wailing at the finality of this thing called death—the realization that no longer would Lazarus’ family and friends every have the opportunity to hear his laugh, to touch his shoulder, to see his wry smile—never again on this earth.

Many church leaders from Jerusalem were there to pay their respects to the two sisters, to console them in their loss. And with the Jewish wailers were the two sisters, closer than anyone to Lazarus. Mary, one of Jesus’ disciples, having not yet come into her own as a bona fide apostle, but the one that sat at his feet, **and** her vivacious sister, the organizer, the one who owned their home

in Bethany, the one that had the Mennolicious gift--Martha, too, was Jesus' beloved friend.

“Why? Why?” They had even sent a message for him. He could have come. And he didn't! Anger, frustration mixed with grief sent Martha into motion when a runner informed her that Jesus was coming, almost there. She had always met stress with action and this was the same, only magnified. She took off to where Jesus would be coming down the dusty road. She ran, a bundle of mixed up emotions. This was a man that.....yes, she was SURE he could...this man could have done a miracle and she had a bone to pick with him!

Jesus, 100% God and 100% human, experienced all of our joys and sorrows, knew all our temptations and carried all our grief. So says Hebrews 4: 14-16.(Read), Isaiah 53: 1-4. The shortest verse in all of scripture reads, “Jesus wept.” In Greek it is correctly translated, Jesus was so upset his bowels were ready to burst. He was violently sick. Another translation says that Jesus was sick he

was weeping so hard. This is my compassionate Savior, the one who weeps when I am weeping.

Trauma begets fear and fear begets regret, and regret fights to regain control and when control is not possible, God gives us tears.

That is our human nature, and yet we will see, Jesus is totally in control.

Carsten is an emotional five-year-old. Like the elderly, whose filters disappear, Carsten's have not yet developed. If he loses a turn in a game, he cries. If he is not winning the game, he cries, and if his mother or sister "tells him what to do" he really cries.

This is all a part of development. I remember some of the criers in the class I was with from Kindergarten through high school. Even today, though I know in my head that there is nothing wrong with tears, I still remember my young mind being impressed with the number of times I heard, "Boys don't cry" and "Crybaby" or the time I learned that men hate it when a woman cries... (Some of YOU have recently helped me see my faulty thinking that "A Pastor should never cry.")

We weep when we are sad, sometimes when we are happy, and often when we are frustrated. Some say that tears are the language of the soul, expressing what words cannot.

The Roman poet, Ovid said that “It is some relief to weep; grief is satisfied and carried off by tears.”

Death. The end of things, the lifelessness of reality. Even as we celebrate death as a home-going and we do believe it is a door, the reality for those left is a hole in their lives and in their hearts, where love had been there in the form of the one who has died.

Mourners are left in the valley of dry bones and this is where Martha was. **He** could have done something.

Instead of answering her question with defensiveness, however, Jesus, her close friend, simply tells her the future. “Your brother will come back to life again.” Boom. Pure and simple, but Martha does not realize he is talking literally, about that day. She thinks he is speaking of the eternal future. And then the statement that pales

all else in intensity and meaning: **“I am the resurrection and the life.” You are talking to the One who gives life itself. Do you believe this, Martha”? God is so big and Jesus is God and, I ma He.”**

Martha **loves** Jesus. She **does** believe him and she tells him this, but then she remembers her role—Good Jews are to grieve heavily for seven days and then lightly for the next thirty. She needs to get back to the house, to fulfill her role as hostess and sister at the calling hours. So she tears back to the house, letting Mary know that Jesus wants to see her and where they were waiting.

Obviously, Jesus wants some alone-time with the two sisters, not wanting to be just one among the crowd of well-wishers. He also had to be aware of the tension-filled atmosphere, with the Jewish leaders from the Temple present. Now Mary, the same one whose love had been translated into tears before, as she had dried Jesus’ feet with her hair, **this** Mary, who was not afraid to sit at the feet of the Rabbi to whom she was devoted, this Mary runs to Jesus, dissolving at his feet, and stating her faith in the following words.”

Lazarus would not have died if you had been here.” “He would still be alive.” More tears. And more wailing by people, Jewish **leaders** Jesus was not used to seeing come apart at the seams. It moves him to tears himself. And then he wants to see him, so see Lazarus and so when they tell him where he is buried, Jesus becomes extremely agitated. The Greek word used here is: God feels our sorrow in his gut. Jesus is a jumble of emotions, just like Martha, but the prevalent emotion for him was anger- anger at the **sin** in the world that made death a reality, angry at the **grief** caused by this sin, angry at **Death itself!**

We have all been there. Angry at Death. Angry at the shortness of life, at the way time flies by and life is over, too soon for those who love and are loved. Too soon.

For some our lives are never the same, as we allow blame and guilt to weigh us down. “If only I had..., If only I hadn’t, If YOU had been there...” Mary’s words are human, echoing across the centuries, keeping us in touch with our shared humanity. Now,

Jesus HIMSELF becomes sick with grief. There is something deeply comforting for us in Christ's sorrow. We CAN ask God "why" and "Why now?" and give him our "If only"s. If we, like Martha, can declare our faith in a God who can make dry bones come alive—then we can also become the HOPE we were created to be. God is in control—our loved ones who have stepped across the veil are in perfect peace—they are whole and not upset with what we may have done or left undone. And we, through faith, can claim God's hope in wholeness and peace. We are not alone. He shares our pain and this sorrow is not the end. Our God is not a distant God. He is here with us in all of life.

This story is a foreshadowing of the victory God orchestrated at Easter. My Lord, our Savior, is so close to us that he feels our sorrow, our pain, and just as he raised Lazaruus, so he also raises us from our pain and sorrow and death, today figuratively, but ultimately in reality.

But that is not the end of the story. Can you imagine Mary and Maratha at the end of this story? Words could not describe their joy, just like the women at the tomb were speechless.

Amen.