

The Lord's Message: I Believe that You are the Christ

Date: November 7, 2021

Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: John 11: 17-44

Today we will celebrate All Saints Sunday. On this day we celebrate and remember those who are with us on our faith journey and those who have gone on to eternal life. The Celtic Christians called this the *thin place*. The place where this world and the next move closer together. It is almost as if you step from one world into the next. Our faith journey in this life leads us on the next.

Let us pray.

Please open your Bibles to **John 11:17-18**. Jesus has waited until this time to go to Bethany. Jesus knew that His friend Lazarus was very sick and would die. Jesus waited until the death of His friend before He would make the journey. Jesus was some kind of friend to wait until His friend died before going to his family. In **John 10:40**, we find that Jesus was only about a day's journey away from Bethany. Jesus did not hurry, but stayed and only arrived in Bethany after Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Why? I do not know, but it can be very difficult for us to understand why God won't heal our loved ones or why God will miraculously heal some and not others. That is where our faith comes in. We just need to trust God.

Jesus may not have come right away at the news of the death of Lazarus, but we read in **John 11:18-19** that others had. When Martha hears that Jesus has finally come, Martha goes out to meet Jesus and in verse 20 makes a statement that we all would make, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Lord if you had performed this miracle, my loved one would still be living. Then after making this statement of fact, Martha goes on to make a statement of her faith in Jesus in verse 21, "But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

The Book of John is a fascinating book. Throughout this Gospel, Jesus is demonstrating his power to give life. In the first verses of the prologue, **John 1:3-4**, Jesus is the source of all creation. Through Christ, eternal life is given, a life-force stronger than death. In **John 3:16**, we discover that the heart of the Gospel message lies in this miracle of life-given. The miracle of life-given is not just for the faithful in eternity, but also here in the present life of the faithful. Jesus says in **John 10:10b**. Through Jesus, we receive life now and in eternity.

Jesus makes this factual statement to Martha in **John 11:23**, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha’s response in **John 11:24**, shows her comprehension of Jewish teachings that when the Messiah would come there would be a final resurrection. This ideal of a final resurrection is found in the Old Testament’s prophecy in **Ezekiel 37:7-14** of the dry bones.

Jesus says in **John 11:25-26**, why wait for that to happen when the Messiah is standing right in front of you. Jesus brings the future resurrection into the present. Death has no power now or in the future for those who believe in Christ. Abundant life is given to all believers. No one has to wait to be resurrected in order to receive this life. After hearing what Jesus says, Martha makes one of the four astounding confessions of faith found in the Book of John here in **John 11:27**.

Martha, after having this profound confession of faith, goes to tell her sister, Mary, “Jesus is here and Jesus is looking for you.” Mary comes to Jesus and says almost the same statement in verse 32, “Lord, if you have been here, my brother would not have died.” I would like for you to open your hymnal to page 874. This is part of our liturgy for a funeral service. “To those who doubt, give light; to those who are weak, strength; to all who have sinned, mercy; to all who have sorrow, your peace.” We believe in Jesus as the Messiah. We believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. We believe that there will be a resurrection and all those that believe in Jesus will live in Heaven with God. We still have doubts when faced with death. We still are weak when staring beyond this life. We still are sinners and in need of a savior. We who have lost loved ones still sorrow and need God’s peace. The *thin place* is still difficult for us to comprehend.

In the next verses, the most profound aspect of God is revealed. Look at **John 11:33-35**. Jesus is overcome with grief by seeing the tears of Mary. The Good News is that we have a God that is not perched on some high throne and cares nothing about His creation. Instead, we have a God that became like us to understand our trials and has compassion on us. In **Hebrews 4:16**, we have a God that has gone through the trials to understand us better.

In **John 11:38-39**, Jesus tells them to take away the stone from the grave. Martha puts up a small protest, “By now his body must smell, for it has been four days since he died!” Jesus reassures her faith in **John 11:40**. The stone is rolled away. In **John 11:43**, Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb and Lazarus walks out. God has performed a mighty miracle. A man who was dead for 4 days is brought back to life.

Now, I am going to go out on a small limb. The Bible does not tell us. This is not recorded in Church history, but I would say at some later time, Lazarus does die. Unless Jesus Christ comes back, we will all die at some time. Life and death are part of this life. For those who say, "I believe that You are the Christ!", we will die in this life, but live forever with God in the next life. Jesus will walk with us through death in this life and into eternal life in the next.

For those who are left behind, God will continue to be with us. God will never leave us nor forsake us. As the community of faith, we need to be the hands and feet of Christ by caring for those who grieve. There will be a hole in their lives and in their heart. We can not fill the hole, but we can show compassion to the grieving person. One of the ways, we can do that is by calling the person or stopping by and visiting them. The holidays can be a very difficult time for those grieving. The person that would be with them is not. Loneliness and depression can set in. With Thanksgiving and Christmas approaching, we could invite them to join us to celebrate these holidays. This way, they will not be alone. This way, they will know that someone cares. We will have a Blue Christmas Service on December 4 in Kronsberg Park. The service is designed for those that still feel the sense of loss. The time is to be determined. Let us be the hands and feet of Christ and support people who are grieving. There is a *thin place* between this life and the next for all of us. We believe in a God who is the source of all life and loves and cares about us. For this reason, let all the faithful boldly say, "I believe that You are the Christ!" Amen.