



# A Message from Pastor Gwen

Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. AMEN

Our reading today was a long one. It is the last, greatest sign and the most significant one in John's Gospel. Since his writings are often referred to as "The Book of Signs", there are many "signs" that point to God and can be seen only with eyes of faith.

The first sign is Jesus changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Then came the healing of the official's son in Chapter 4, which is followed by the healing of a paralytic in the next chapter. A big sign comes when Jesus feeds the five thousand with a few loaves of bread and a few fish. Continuing on, Jesus walks on water and gives sight to a blind man. And then comes our story of Lazarus, the greatest of signs and longest telling of a story. This story of raising Lazarus from the dead is very important, as it is a foretaste of what is to come for Jesus.

Interestingly, if we follow the location of these signs we notice something happening there. The first two took place in Cana. Then the stories of signs moves to Jerusalem. The fourth and fifth sign take place in Galilee. And now today's reading, this sign is the only one that takes place in Bethany. And if you know your geography of 1<sup>st</sup> century, you remember that Bethany is only about 2 miles from Jerusalem. A bit of looking ahead of what is to come, wouldn't you say?

Also scattered through these signs or series of miracles, John recounts metaphors as to who Jesus is. At the well, with the woman Jesus says He is living water. As he feeds the 5000 He is the bread of life. Jesus is noted as the light of the world as He gives sight to the man born blind. And now with the bringing of Lazarus back to life, Jesus reveals himself as the resurrection and the life.

And then we cannot miss the parallels and contrasts that are created between the story of the death of Lazarus and Jesus. They share the anointing of the dead, burial in a tomb sealed with a stone, grave clothes, an empty tomb and disbelief. There is so much packed into this reading for this morning and so many possibilities for discussion. However, with that being said, each time I read this lesson, what kept coming to the forefront was "Waiting". How Jesus waited to go to Bethany and how Mary and Martha waiting for him to come. I am sure the Holy Spirit had something to do with that word popping into my head, especially considering the way we are

all waiting to get out of the house, to get eggs and toilet paper, to hug our friends and come again to worship our Lord and Savior at Christ the Servant.

As our story begins, Mary and Martha, the sister's of Lazarus send word to Jesus that he is very sick. Mary, Martha and Lazarus have been good friends with Jesus for quite some time. Even though they were close friends, Jesus does not drop everything like you would expect him to and go to Bethany to see Lazarus. Some find this troubling. Wouldn't you expect your dearest friend to come to your aid when you are sick? But Jesus waits. He actually waits two days before he starts for Lazarus's home.

Imagine with me what those two days must have been like for Mary and Martha. Lazarus has died and still no Jesus at their door. But Jesus knows what has happened. He knew that Lazarus was dead and he knew what he was going to do. But does that help Mary and Martha in their grief? No.

By now 4 days have gone by and Jesus finally shows up in town. Both women, one at a time go to where Jesus was and confront him. In their grief they say that "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." A little bit of blame there don't you think? Mary and Martha are grief stricken and I would imagine, a bit angry that Jesus did not come when they sent out the emergency call. Both sisters loved Jesus but were unhappy with his tardy, seemingly uncaring, behavior.

John does not say why Jesus waited to go to Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Theologians have speculated but no one has a good answer.

How many times in our lives do we wonder as we wait? We wonder why we get no answer to our prayers. We wonder how come a situation will not resolve itself for us. We wonder how much longer we need to wait. And as we wonder our thoughts go to Why isn't Jesus here when I need him. Or we wonder why doesn't God hurry up and do something.

I do think that we share in the pain that waiting has caused Mary and Martha. We too have had loved ones die. We have had our dreams and plans die as well. We know what it is like to wait, grief saddened with questions in our hearts.

Today in the midst of the Corona Virus pandemic we too are waiting. Waiting maybe with fear, that we will be a victim of the virus or waiting to get out of the house and have life back to normal. As Americans, I do not think that we are not particularly good at waiting for anything. Our lives have been so led by the swiftness of technology that we find it hard to sit still and wait for anything.

I am a very guilty human. I impatiently wait in the Dr office as I watch my appointment time go by. I wait online for a reply to an email I sent just a few minutes ago. I get anxious and frustrated when I make a call and no one calls be right back. Our whole society has become so

used to instant gratification, due to the internet, to technology, that I think we have lost the art of waiting. (if there ever was such a thing!)

I don't think that we will ever know why Jesus waited to go to Lazarus. No amount of theologizing will satisfy us. Just as today we will not be satisfied to simply wait.

The importance of waiting is that I believe that something happens while we wait. Life is lived while we wait. Faith is present and our hope is tested as we too wait for Jesus to come to us.

The COVID-19 situation we all find ourselves in will come to an end. Our waiting for the freedom to buy our eggs, toilet paper and hand sanitizer again will emerge. Our waiting for the freedom to go out of the house and visit friends, have dinner out or see a movie will return. But until then we wait and hope that it will be sooner than later.

If I had a nickel for every time Rodney has said to me, "Patience is a virtue", I would be a rich woman! And yes, I know the joke, if I had patients I would be a Dr. Well, I am no doctor. And patience is not one of my greatest virtues. It is hard to have patience and wait.

And while this pandemic is going through our country, we are waiting. It is a great time when we can connect with God on a more personal level. We can turn our waiting time into time to read Scripture, time to pray, time to worship, time to encourage others and a time to serve. And I don't need to tell you how to do these things. They are all part of who we are as followers, disciples of Jesus.

And so, I encourage you all to not be fearful, but rather seize this time of waiting for normalcy to return. Use it to honor Jesus who died for us. Jesus who suffered on the cross for us. Jesus who took our sin away and returned on the third day to overcome the death that we deserve.

Today, as we think about the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, it reveals to us that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. As God resurrected Lazarus, so to, we will be resurrected to new life in Jesus. As verse 25 claims, "Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they died, will live. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." So we wait. Wait with the hope of Christ Jesus. AMEN