

Hurricane

John 11:1-57

Key Verse: 11:5-6

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days...”

Think about your life. Do you think that God loves you? How do you know if God loves you? Does he lavish you with great blessings and gifts? Does he give you candy and money and a wonderful family that is just perfect in every way with sparkling smiles and perfect complexion? The Bible says that God loves us. The most famous verse in the Bible is about God's love for us. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Elsewhere the Bible says that God is love, and as Christians, the most well known way that God shows his love to us is that Jesus died for our sins on the cross to give us eternal life. That's the essence of John 3:16 and is fundamental to Christianity. God's love for us is what separates Christianity from other faiths. But is that the only way that God shows his love? Some people think that God loves his people by showering them all sorts of shiny little gifts and makes everything polished and perfect like some sort of supernatural sugar daddy. Today's passage showed how Jesus loved one family and that love looks to be a little rough. Strangely enough, the love that Jesus shows this one family is a lot like the day-to-day love that Jesus shows each and every one of us.

The passage starts out, “Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.” (1) The Bible introduces a family, two sisters Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. This family lived in Bethany, which was about two miles outside of Jerusalem. Even though the Bible doesn't mention it directly, this family was on the wealthy side. We find out in chapter 12 that they have a bottle of perfume worth a year's wages or around \$32,000 today. Poor people don't have \$32k perfume. Also, during the mourning, there were a lot of people coming to comfort the sisters, which is also a sign of wealthy family. Like this passage says, the brother Lazarus was sick. Lazarus contracted some sort of illness, and it was bad and could lead to death. “So the sisters sent word to Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick.’” (3) Jesus had a relationship with this family. He must have spent quite a bit of time with them, especially when he came to Jerusalem. All that Mary and Martha had to tell Jesus was, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” That was all they had to say and Jesus knew what it meant.

“When he heard this, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.’” (4) Oh man, this sounds awesome. Jesus says, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it. I got this. Don't worry; I'll take care of everything. Let's do this.” On it's own, that's how I read it. But immediately after this, it's a little different. “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea.’” (5-7) So my interpretation now becomes, “I got this. Don't worry; I'll take care of everything. Let's do this.” And then Jesus sits back down, grabs a snack, takes a nap, talks to the disciples for two whole days, and then he says, “Let's go back to Judea.” I think my initial interpretation is lacking something. Jesus doesn't seem stoked to heal. Instead, he waits for two more days. It is almost like he doesn't care. Thankfully, we know that is not true, because before the passage says that Jesus waited, John wrote in undeniable terms that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

In fact, it was because Jesus loved them that Jesus waited. The old version of the NIV says, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days." The "yet" at the beginning of verse 6 makes things sound like, "Jesus loved them, but he stayed." If you look at other translations, either word-for-word translations like the King James or even the newest NIV use either the word "therefore" or "so". The original texts have a word like therefore or so, so that the passage says, "Jesus loved them, so he stayed" or "Jesus loved them, therefore he stayed." It was because of Jesus love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus that Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. This seems very odd, but Jesus reiterates something like this to his disciples.

When Jesus said that they were going back to Judea, the disciples reminded Jesus that the people wanted to kill him, but Jesus told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." (11) The disciples completely missed the boat and thought that Jesus meant that Lazarus was taking a nap, not taking a dirt nap. Jesus corrects them, "So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'" (14-15) Again, this sounds a little callous. "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there." It's almost like Jesus is saying that he is glad that Lazarus is dead. What kind of friend is that? Is this how Jesus treats the people he loves?

But look closer at the verse. Jesus says, "for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." Jesus is not glad that Lazarus is dead. He is glad that he has an opportunity to help his disciples, Mary, Martha, and even Lazarus believe. Jesus is glad because he now has an opportunity to help all these people to know more about who he is. Jesus can show them the fullness of how he is God and no one, not even death, can take anyone from his hand. Jesus said that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death, but would be a moment for God's glory to shine and glorify his Son. Lazarus died, but Jesus said it was not the end.

So let's see how this happened. "On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days." (17) When Jesus got to Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead and buried for four days. This has some significance. The Jews commonly believed that after a person died, the soul would hang around the body for three days. During those three days, there was always a hope that the soul would reenter the body and the person would be alive again. However, four days is greater than three, therefore the Lazarus was considered stone dead with no hope of coming back. His body was cold and he was stiff and already started to decompose. There was no hope of Lazarus walking out of the tomb and everyone knew it.

A lot of people were in Bethany comforting the sisters. When Martha heard that Jesus arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." (21-22) Her first words to Jesus show that she doubts Jesus. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Martha had sent word to Jesus about Lazarus, but Jesus showed up too late to save him. Because Jesus didn't answer when she called, her brother had died. This thought is repeated two more times. Mary repeats the exact same thing when she meets Jesus, and the crowd of mourners speaks the same way too. I think that this is something that we all do. When crisis comes, we cry out for help and demand that God solve the issue now. When nothing seems to happen, we ask, "God where were you?"

On September 11, 2001, 2,819 people lost their lives in the terrorist attacks. On December 26, 2003, 26,000 people lost their lives in an earthquake in Bam, Iran. On December 26, 2004, 216,000 people died in the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. On January 12, 2010 50,000 – 92,000 people lost their lives in an earthquake in Haiti. And on March 11, 2011 a massive earthquake struck off the coast of Japan caused a tsunami that created the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. Each of these days, there are people who ask, “God where were you? If you had been here, then these people would not have died.” Closer to home, we have loved ones who have been diagnosed with cancer or heart disease. We have people who are close to us who are taken from us. Last July, my cousin was trying to change a light bulb during a power outage during a storm. She fell off the stepladder and banged the back of her head on a piece of concrete. She bled out and died, and she wasn’t even 35. God where were you?

Martha, Mary, and the crowd all wondered if Jesus even cared. Why did Jesus wait? He waited because he cared...because he loved them all. Martha’s second sentence to Jesus had a little hope, “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Martha knew Jesus, but I think that some of what she knew was in her head and she really didn’t full understand it. Jesus reassures her, “Your brother will rise again.” (23) But Martha, like I said, didn’t really understand. She said that they knew that he would rise again at the final resurrection, but that was only where her hope laid. It didn’t seem to console her all that much.

To this Jesus says to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (25-26) Jesus tells Martha that he is life and he is resurrection. Jesus doesn’t say that he gives life and resurrection, but he is life and resurrection. His very essence is life and is the source of all life in the universe. This is what he wanted the disciples, Mary, Martha and Lazarus to know. Jesus wasn’t a man who could heal the sick, he wasn’t a man who could calm a storm, he wasn’t a man who could feed a city with five biscuits and two sardines. Jesus wanted them to know that he is God, who has authority over all creation, including death. Bob, last week, said that we are only certain about death and taxes, but Jesus has authority over both. Death has no power compared to that of Jesus. Not even death can snatch anyone from Jesus’ hand because he is life.

Jesus asks Martha if she believes this and her answer is sort of a half answer. She doesn’t directly answer if she does believe it, but she does say that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. She then, goes to get Mary, and Mary comes and falls at Jesus’ feet, weeping. Jesus is so troubled at the sight of Mary and the others weeping, he asks where they laid Lazarus, and the people show him. There is so much doubt and emotion going on here and when Jesus reached the tomb, he tells the people to move the stone at the entrance of the tomb. Martha replies that her brother had been in there for four days and is probably stinking up the joint now. “Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’” (40) They moved the stone and Jesus begins to pray to God, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” (41-42) Then he cries out, “Lazarus, come out!” (43), and Lazarus comes out of the grave still covered in the grave clothes. Lazarus was back.

It was amazing. Jesus showed his power over death. Jesus showed that only he is God. This is how much Jesus loved everybody there. This is why Jesus waited. Jesus loved them so much that he wanted them to know that he is the author of life, that he is life, and he proved it. The people had misconceptions about what was possible. The problem that they faced in Lazarus dying seemed too big for anybody, including Jesus. They were making God

too small. Our God is a big god. He is bigger than the whole universe for all time. Know that no matter how big of a problem that sits right in front of you, you have a God that is infinitely larger than that problem, even if that problem is death. Do you see how it is in love that Jesus wants to break that misconception? When we limit God in our minds, then he is not God and we are broken because we are limited. Many times, God puts us into terrible situations so that we can know how big our God is. What do we think is more final than death? It is impossible for us to escape death, but to Jesus, it is nothing but sleep. Whatever fear we have of death, it is insignificant compared to Jesus. Paul wrote, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

I say that this is love, but these actions seem foreign to us. We get our concept of love from romantic comedies, greeting cards, and those little candy hearts sold around Valentine's Day. The love we know revolves around ourselves. We think that person loves us when they meet certain expectations that we have decided. When a person properly speaks our love language, then that person loves us. If they don't do this or act a certain way around me, then they must not love me. "My husband doesn't love me because he doesn't tell me that he loves me. My wife doesn't love me because she doesn't put her dirty dishes in the sink. My friends don't love me because they don't bow down and worship me like I am god." When we are self-centered in this way toward other people, every word that does not meet our expectation is seen as an act of dis-love. When we think first of ourselves, is it any wonder that half of all marriages end in divorce?

The thing is that we act like that towards God, too. We expect God to do something for us. We think that if we love God, then he will love us back in the form of blessing, like helping us do better in school, helping us financially, or helping us stay out of sticky situations. You know, "I've read my Bible everyday, I go to church on Sundays, and I pray to God all the time, why doesn't he answer me when I cry out to him? He must not love me." That sort of thought makes your relationship with God to be very shallow. God wants to bless you, but he wants you even more. Jesus loves you so much that he is like a surgeon cutting out the cancer in your soul. Jesus doesn't want you to doubt. He doesn't want you to live in fear. Fear and doubt keep us from God.

I know that this is not an easy thing to take. Going through tough times is hard. I am certain that Mary and Martha were anguishing in their souls at the loss of Lazarus. I am certain that it was very painful and could easily cause them to doubt the power and love of their God. On January 27, 2009, just over three years ago, the only grandparent I ever knew died at the age of 86. Even though she was old, it still hurt when my parents called me to let me know. I was in tears. She met Viola, but would never see us married, and she would never meet any of our children. She was the first person who was anywhere close to me to die. Whoever said that loss and pain doesn't hurt? Jesus didn't.

Jesus' love for us can be quite painful, but the glory on the other side is beyond measure. There is a song by David Crowder that goes, "He is jealous for me, Loves like a hurricane, I am a tree, Bending beneath the weight of his wind and mercy. When all of a sudden, I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by glory, And I realize just how beautiful You are, And how great Your affections are for me." Mary and Martha had Lazarus back and now had seen whom it was who stood in front of them. They had seen with their own eyes the face of God. Their fear of death and their fatalism made God so small, but their preconceptions were broken and they were now able to become whole. Jesus gave them the opportunity to

overcome even death itself. By allowing them to have the pain and helping them to know that their thoughts about God were wrong, Mary, Martha, Lazarus and the disciples were able to see the fullness of God's glory.

After seeing Jesus raise Lazarus, there were two responses. One was to believe that Jesus was God (45), which is what Jesus wanted. The other response was to run and tell the Pharisees. These people did not believe, but lived in fear of the Pharisees. And the Pharisees and chief priests got together and they began to talk about killing Jesus. They were afraid of losing their cushy position in Jewish society, but the high priest Caiaphas said, "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." (50) It looks like evil men want to destroy the work of God, but the wonderful thing is that even this response can be used for God's glory. God is so powerful that he can use evil for his own good. "He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one." (51-52) It was God's plan to unite all his people, Jewish and Gentile with the blood of Christ. That's an awesome God.

I want to conclude where I began, with God's love. God's love for us can feel like a hurricane, just ripping us apart. We can call it pruning or purifying us. We can call it God's discipline to make us perfect, but it is God's love. God is waiting to help you because he loves you. You might have been crying out for a decade for God to help you, but you know what, God waited thousands of years before sending Jesus and it's been two thousand years and Jesus hasn't come back yet, all because he loves us and wants us to know who he is. You might think that this sort of love is way too rough. "How could God put us through this if he loves us so much? Couldn't he wave his hands and make it all better? I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I want to go through this. It just seems so wrong to make us hurt so much to be healed." If you think that Jesus' love is too rough for you, remember that Jesus is not being rough to be sadistic. We need the surgery to remove our cancer, but Jesus is a God who takes it as well as he gives it. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He bore the weight of our sins on that tree. Jesus was separated from God, humiliated, beaten, nailed and shattered for us. Jesus' love for us may be difficult to take at times, but God's love for us was extremely difficult for Jesus to take. Jesus prayed and sweated blood while asking God to find another way, but he still took our punishment. Jesus is a God that understands suffering. Jesus is a God who understands your situation. He understands it more than you do. Never forget how much God loves you. In every part of your life, start with how much he loves you. He loves us. O, how he loves us! How he loves us all!