March 26, 2023 **Breath of Hope**

The gospel reading for this Sunday John chapter 11, explains to us Jesus raises Lazarus from the death. Chapters eleven and twelve, form a distinct unit in the overall structure of the gospel. In this section Lazarus is raised from the death, causing the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus to death. The first half of the John gospel is called “the Book of Signs. John records seven signs in the first half of his gospel. They are “Turning Water into Wine (John 2:1-12), Healing the Nobleman's Son (John 4:46-54), Healing the Man at the Pool (John 5:1-11), Feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-15), Walking on Water (John 6:16-21), Healing a Man Born Blind (John 9:1-12) and Resurrecting Lazarus (John 11).”

Jesus and Lazarus were friends and the sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha thought he should know of his illness. Jesus’ subsequent failure to drop everything and go to him is not because of indifference. He has a greater purpose in mind. This illness…is for the glory of God: The symbolic Lazarus will die but will not stay dead. God’s power to give life will be made manifest just as his power to bestow light became clear in chapter nine, with the curing of the blind man. That the Son of God may be glorified through it: This would mean that people would praise Jesus for the miracle.

However, John means it on another level, in the sense that this miracle will lead to Jesus’ own death, which is a stage in his ultimate glorification. Hidden in the darkness of the crucifixion is the light of the resurrection. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus: Here we are told Jesus has the kind of love for Lazarus and his sisters that marks Christian love: laying down one’s life for friends' love, sacrificial love, one-way love, unemotional, attitudinal love. This love, love in and from the eternal perspective gave Jesus cause to pause. His natural impulse would be to go to Lazarus.

However, in the bigger picture, his physical death would become an opportunity to do something greater, to give glory to God. Jesus would be of even more help to Lazarus when he was dead. So, Jesus will wait. He would put his emotional love, friendship, in second place and refrain from rushing to Lazarus, something his sister Martha would need to have explained to her.

Jesus distinguishes between a state of emergency or panic, which this situation is not, and a sense of urgency or anticipation, which reflects the attitude Christians are to have in the light of imminent death. After two days have passed, Jesus decides it is time to go to Judea, where Bethany is located, about two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus is a marked man. The authorities are on the lookout for him. If they had post offices then, his picture would be among the ten most wanted. Thus, Jesus is going to give life to Lazarus, at the risk of his own life, which, in turn, the giving of his life, will be a demonstration of his own conquest of death.

Jesus says Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him: To the physical eye, Lazarus will appear dead; to the spiritual eye he will be seen for what he really is, merely asleep. Jesus is not denying the physical reality, but interpreting it in the light of eternity. The disciples say to Jesus, Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved.

Jesus accepts the physical fact of Lazarus’ death. He rejects the notion that Lazarus is physically asleep, though he does mean that he is symbolically asleep. Jesus is glad, what is a cause for sorrow is a cause for rejoicing that he was not there when Lazarus died, for he can now turn this sad event into an opportunity for belief on the part of his disciples. The Jews believed that the soul surely left the dead body after three days. This remark is to indicate that Lazarus was irretrievably dead, not just mistakenly sleeping. In John “Jews,” is a generic term for the religious authorities and the “authoritative” Jews, such as the Pharisees.

The important thing that attracted me most in this passage is verse 35 “Jesus wept”. When we look deep into what is happening Jesus could be moved to compassion quite easily. His friend Mary is crying. His friend Lazarus is dead. Even though Jesus knows what he is about to do, the crowd does not. Thus, part of the reason for noting Jesus’ tears is to keep the suspense mounting. And, no doubt, the other part is to teach a lesson. Jesus wept at the death of his friend even though he would soon raise him. Christians weep at the death of their loved ones, even though they know they will be raised up as well. The one does not preclude the other, nor do tears indicate a lack of faith. If you would like to know more about Jesus the “Breath of Hope” Please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister