

*Lent 5, March 9, 2008*  
*St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, WI*

## ***Watch Jesus Under Pressure***

*1. He loves. 2. He waits. 3. He weeps. 4. He speaks.*

*John 11:1-45*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Here is your word for the day: To vet. It means “to examine or appraise expertly.” I’ve seen and heard it used in conjunction with the presidential campaign, that one of the reasons for the long primary season is so that each of the candidates can be vetted – examined or appraised expertly by the press.

Just as the campaign puts pressure on the presidential candidates and we learn about them by their reactions under pressure, so Jesus is under pressure at this point in his ministry. In John chapter 10 we see Jesus up in Jerusalem at Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication. The Jews heard Jesus claim that he was making himself equal with God and they wanted to stone him. The threat of death pressures him. In our lesson for today (John 11:1-45) Jesus is also under the pressure of tragedy in his personal life – the sudden death of a close friend. How will Jesus react? It is our opportunity to “vet” Jesus!

### **WATCH JESUS UNDER PRESSURE!**

First of all, let’s take a close look at Jesus’ personal friends. What can we learn about Jesus from his friends?

There is Lazarus, the man who is sick. He is described as one whom Jesus loved. There are two different words for love in this section. Phileo is the love of friendship. Agapao is the love of self-sacrifice. “Lord, the one you love as close personal friend (phileo) is sick.”

There is Mary. This is the Mary who sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to him when her sister Martha was busy in the kitchen getting the food ready (Luke 10:38-42). This is the Mary who understood why Jesus had come. In John 12, the next time Jesus comes to their home in Bethany, Mary anoints his feet with perfume and wipes them with her hair. “She did it to prepare me for burial” (Matthew 26:12). She understood he had come to be the promised Savior who would die for them.

And there was Martha. The busy homemaker who wanted everything just right for her guest, but who then ruined everything by complaining to that very guest, “Don’t you care that I’m slaving away in the kitchen and Mary is just sitting here doing nothing?”

How did Jesus feel about Martha? Look at verse five. “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” This word for love is agapao—the love of self-sacrifice. He would give anything for this family. Notice how they are introduced. Martha first! Mary not even mentioned by name as if to emphasize how he felt about Martha. And then Lazarus. Jesus wasn’t holding a grudge against Martha. He loved her just like Mary and Lazarus.

So what can we learn from Jesus’ circle of friends?

Someone who is a close personal friend of Jesus can get very sick. Trouble in life – whether it be sickness, death in the family, or financial heartache – is not an indication that you are some how distant from Jesus.

If you understand who Jesus is, like Mary understood, then no situation is hopeless. In Greek there is a little word that is translated “so” at the beginning of verse 3. It usually is translated “therefore.” It means that because the prior sentence is true, it makes good sense to do the next thing. Since Mary understood so much about Jesus, it just made logical sense that when trouble struck her family, she and Martha asked Jesus for help.

This is the key, brothers and sisters! Are you spending the time to get to know Jesus better like Mary did? Or are you content with your current knowledge? No relationship grows stronger by ignoring it! At the beginning of Lent we all received a little blue card that would lead us through the New Testament during the Lent and Easter seasons. Are you reading those lessons? Are you systematically trying to get to know Jesus better? If not, when are you going to start? When trouble strikes—and trouble will strike you even though you are a friend of Jesus—you need to have a strong relationship with the only One who can help. Now is the time to dedicate a part of every day to building up that relationship!

Finally, as you get to know Jesus, you see that he holds no grudges! Don’t you suppose that Martha must have thought over and over about that encounter with Jesus? “How could I be so dumb as to scold Jesus? What will he think of me?” The reality is that Jesus loved Martha, and he loves you, with a self-sacrificing, agapao love as we see in this chapter. He has forgiven you. You can admit your failures, your sins – and he still loves!

That is the first thing we see about Jesus. **He loves!** The second thing that strikes us is that **he waits!**

Jesus knows how everything is going to turn out. “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Mary and Martha and Lazarus didn’t know how it would turn out. From their perspective it was turning out very different than that. From the disciples’ perspective, it wasn’t turning out that way. But Jesus sees the future clearly.

Because he knows how everything is going to turn out, he waits. He waits for the right time to act. After two days he says, “Let’s go back to Judea.” In December the Jews were trying to stone Jesus. It is now a couple of months later. The disciples tell him, “Jesus, they haven’t forgotten about you!”

But Jesus isn’t afraid. “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light (literally “in him.”).

Jesus wasn’t afraid because he was walking in the light – he was doing his Father’s will. When you walk in the light of God’s Word, seeking to do his will, you don’t have to be afraid. That was true of Jesus. That is true of us too.

Jesus travels up to Bethany, about a day’s walk away. First Martha comes out to him. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” We hear the exact same words from Mary. It is as if this had become a mantra for them. Over and over again they mourned together, “If only Jesus had been here, if only Jesus had been here, if only Jesus had been here.”

Jesus knows the future. “Your brother will rise again.” Martha knows that. She didn’t spend all her time in the kitchen. She understood, “Yes, Lord, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Now listen very carefully to Jesus’ next words.

“I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. (Got that? Ignore what your eyes see! Jesus sees what we can’t. Even though we see a dead body, Jesus knows that anyone who believes in him will live again even though his body dies.) And whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (In fact, Martha, your brother Lazarus isn’t dead at all. He will never die because he knows me.) (John 11:25,26)

Does this give us insight! We see a dead body. Jesus sees a body that will rise from the grave on the last day. We see a dead person. Jesus sees someone who is living and reigning with him in heaven right at this very moment.

Jesus knew all of that. Yet when Mary and Martha take him to the tomb, he weeps.

“When Jesus saw her (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (John 11:33). The word for “troubled” actually means to shake with emotion. And the word “deeply moved in spirit” usually is translated “indignant or angry.” Jesus wept because he saw how sin and death had effected his close personal friends. He was angry at the power of Satan. And he was ready to act.

This is the Jesus we need to know. When he ascended into heaven, he didn’t put his humanity aside. He is still the God/Man. He still is able to sympathize with us in our weakness (Hebrews 4:15). He too is distressed when we are distressed. “In all their distress he too was distressed” (Isaiah 63:9). Jesus is moved by our sorrows, by our pain. And **he weeps** with us. And then **he speaks!**

Sometimes his words sound so strange and harsh. “Take away the stone.” How awful that Martha is the one who has to say about her own brother, “Jesus, he’s been there for four days already. He is already starting to stink.”

Jesus, what you say makes no sense. It is dead. It is hopeless.

But Jesus insists, “Take away the stone.” And he speaks. “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man walks!

Not even death makes Jesus afraid. He has power even over death. That’s why we call that plot of ground on the west side of our campus a cemetery, which means a place of sleep. We know that when Jesus comes back on the last day, he will again say to all the dead, “Come out.” All the dead will rise. Those who died in unbelief will rise to suffer soul and body in hell. But those who died as believers in Jesus will enjoy a resurrection to a new life.

Paul was inspired to tell us about that resurrection body in Philippians 3:21: “He will change our lowly bodies to be like his [Jesus’] glorious body.” In 1 Corinthians 15 we are told that the body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body (and here think “sinful nature – a body that is so often under the control of the sinful nature and doing what the real you and me – the believer – really doesn’t want to do)... It is sown a natural body under the power of the sinful nature, it is raised a spiritual body, completely under the control of the Spirit of God. We’ll never have to be afraid of sinning again. That will be true freedom!

It is no wonder that our dear sister in Christ, Joanne Patch, wanted to hear this lesson over and over again. When Pastor Kuehl visited her in the last days before God called her home to heaven, she wanted to hear that Jesus raised Lazarus. Why? Because she wanted to see Jesus as the one who loves her, who knew her distress, and was able to bring her body forth from the grave like Lazarus. Jesus speaks with almighty power – what we call “omnipotence.”

But bodies aren't the only thing that dies. Marriages can die. Often couples come into the pastors' studies with the news, "Our marriage is dead." There is no love left. There is no hope left. It is the pastor's privilege to be Jesus' mouthpiece and call out, "Take away the stone!" The couple plead, "No pastor, you don't understand. Our marriage is dead. Has been for a long time. Jesus waited too long. There is no hope. The marriage already stinks." But Jesus insists, "Roll back the stone."

And if that couple believes in the Son of God who raised the dead, they can also see the glory of God as he makes their marriage come back to life. First they see that in spite of all their sins, Jesus still loves them. And as their dead heart beats again with the confidence that Jesus really did die for all their sins, then they begin to realize that each can hardly offer anything less to the other – the forgiveness of sins. And a miracle happens. As they forgive each other, a dead marriage comes back to life.

After the 9:30 service this morning, a Christian sister wanted me to share this story with you. Her marriage was dead last September. No hope. They separated. Jesus had waited too long. But she kept praying. And Jesus spoke. He opened their hearts. He brought their marriage back from the dead. They now see the glory of God. Will you let Jesus roll back the stone in your marriage and let him bring what is dead to life?

Pastor Ben of Victory of the Lamb told us about Gil – a tough, man's man, that he met while vicaring in Texas. Gil made it clear that he didn't want anything to do with that church down the street where Ben worked. He was an atheist. His heart was dead. But Jesus loved Gil. Jesus waited until the right time. One day Gil came knocking on Ben's door. There were tears in the eyes of his tough guy. "Could you come down and pray with my wife and me? We just found out she has cancer and she is going to die." Gil found out that Jesus understood his sorrow and had the power to give eternal life and eternal hope. That spiritually dead heart began to beat. Jesus makes the dead come to life!

Or yesterday at the men's rally I heard about Jose, a man living in the Amazon jungle in Peru. His heart was dead too. He was a cocaine addict and paid for his addiction by smuggling cocaine out of the jungle. When a missionary wanted to visit villages in the jungle, he asked for a guide. Everyone recommended Jose, so he hired Jose. As the missionary shared the love of Christ in the various villages, Jose listened too. And gradually he came to realize that Jesus loved him unconditionally, and that Jesus had waited until just the right time to come into his life, and that Jesus cared about his hopelessness and despair, and that Jesus had the power to free him. Jesus spoke, and his spiritually dead heart began to beat! Today Jose and his wife are Sunday School teachers in our mission in Peru.

So what part of your life is dead right now? We all have them? Where does it seem that there is no hope? That's the part of your life that Jesus is speaking to: "Roll back the stone." No, Jesus. It is dead. It is hopeless. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" Speak, Lord. Speak into those parts of our lives. Make the dead walk! Give us life and hope – in the face of death and any trouble. Amen.

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