

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS!

He knows how to treat his friends -- He knows how to help his friends

John 11:1-15

TEXT: *Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." 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." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" Jesus answered, "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." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 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."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

The miracle that got Jesus crucified was the one that follows the incident recorded in the Scripture before us today. The miracle was preceded by the discourse between Jesus and Martha, the sister of the dead man named Lazarus. She and her sister, Mary, had sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. It was an urgent prayer that Jesus should come and heal him. But the Bible says: *Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."* By that time, Lazarus' sickness had ended in his death. You can hear the painful disappointment in Martha's voice a few verses later when she met Jesus on his arrival in Bethany: *"Lord, ... if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* Then came those blessed words of our Lord: *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."* Jn 11

This is the humble confess of Jesus' friends. Like Martha, we also confess, even in the midst of disappointment and death, even in the state of confusion and uncertainty: *I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.* Jn 11 So let us also step back upon this confession of faith and declare what is observed in this morning's Word of God: WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS! He knows how to treat his friends. He knows how to help his friends

Jesus knows how to treat his friends. He knows how to treat his friends even when it appears that he doesn't. Have you ever felt that way? Jesus was some 25-30 miles away on the other side of the Jordan River when he received word that Lazarus was sick. Today, Jesus is just on the other side of heaven's veil. His Word is that he is with us always. The Lord's Supper assures us of his closeness to us, and yet he often seems far away.

Not only was Jesus a couple days' journey away, the Bible says: *Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."* This does not sound like a very good friend at all. I don't know of a pastor in our synod who doesn't quickly get dressed, jump in his car and drive to the hospital when an urgent call comes in the middle of the night. It goes with being a pastor. Sometimes we get there in time, and sometimes we might not make it. But when someone calls and says "my mother is dying," we don't say, "I'll wait a couple of days."

Nevertheless, the Bible says: *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.* And it also says that when the sisters sent their prayer to Jesus they said: *Lord, the one you love is sick.* So how does this come together so that we sing hymns like "What a Friend We Have in Jesus! (#411)? How does a God of love allow his friends to suffer many things, carry many heavy crosses, and even die?

In this specific situation the Bible tells us why Jesus PURPOSELY let Lazarus get sicker and sicker

until he breathed his last even before making his way back to Judea to help him: *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."* There can be no greater honor in life than to be selected by God to bring glory to Jesus in some way or another!

We can imagine our own ways to bring glory to God, thinking that we will do this or that for the Lord. But when Jesus himself selects you to bring glory to God in a way that is truly God's work, that is a great honor, even though it may involve pain or loss.

This we are unable to do on our own. We are sinful and incapable of knowing or doing what truly pleases and glorifies God. He reminds us: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Is 55 And so it must be taken by faith those words of Paul: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.* Ro 8

What a friend in Jesus who is God! He knows how to treat his friends as royal heirs of God's grace and glory. And he also knows exactly how to help his friends to bring all this about to the glory of God's name.

When Jesus began his trip to Bethany he already knew what he was going to do. He knew that by the time he would arrive there Lazarus would already be dead and buried for four days. He knew that Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, would be heartbroken. He knew that even though they did not understand God's ways in this they would not falter from trusting in Jesus as their friend. In fact, when Jesus arrived and said: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"* Jn 11 Jesus knew that Marth would respond with the same confession of faith that we all share: *Yes, Lord, ... I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.* Jesus knew all this, and yet because of Jesus' love for his friends, even though he already knew that he was going raise Lazarus back to life, the Bible says that Jesus wept. He knows and feels our pain and sorrow.

Nevertheless, Jesus came to Bethany to help his friends because they asked him. They prayed to him. And so our Lord also commands us to pray. He commands us to pour out our pains and sorrows, our fears and disappointments. He commands us to talk to him because that's what friends do.

The question is for me is "am I Jesus' friend?" I must confess that I'm not as good of friend to Jesus as Jesus has been to me. I have sinned against Jesus and his Word countless times. I have sinned, and yet Jesus died on the cross to pay for my sins. While I have often hesitated to confess his friendship many times and have lived a life of shallow friendship, he called me into his family through Holy Baptism even before I ever knew his name! And like Jesus' disciples who on that night before his crucifixion betrayed, denied and ran away from him, he still comes back to me time and time again through his promise of the Lord's Supper that he gave those fickle friends that night of its institution and still serves us to this day. Eat, drink; this is my body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins, my dear friends.

Am I Jesus' friend? According to his own Word, according to the cross and his resurrection promises, according to Jesus' promise in Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, he is indeed my friend! Let us believe Jesus' promises of such a friendship that he makes all things work out in our lives to the glory of his saving name. Let us believe our Friend and pray!

What a friend we have in Jesus! All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer! Amen.