

It's important that we note that there's a qualifier here: that those who believe in him will live. Jesus asks Martha if she believes his promise of the resurrection and the life. She responds calmly and confidently, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." While Jesus came into this world to live, suffer, and die for the sins of all; while "he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:2); while he is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), the promise of the resurrection to eternal life in heaven applies only to those who believe in him, to those who by faith embrace him as their Savior and Lord. Paul the Apostle writes, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Ro 8:1). In other words, there is not—nor can there ever be—salvation outside of Jesus Christ.

Fellow redeemed, what blessings are ours that God's plan of salvation required that our Savior be both divine and human, that he be both fully God and fully man. And how thankful we can be that in Christ Jesus we have such a Savior. As Paul writes to Timothy, "There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people" (1 Tm 2:5, 6). It's in the God-man that we have the blessings of forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and eternal life in heaven. And it's in the God-man that we have a Savior who is like us in every way, except that he did not sin. He grieves. Amen.

John 11:17-27, 38-44 – Like Us in Every Way – 376, 110, 128
04/02/17 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI

On the Sundays in Lent this year, we're worshiping under the general theme *Like Us in Every Way*. This theme points to Jesus and comes from various passages in the New Testament book of Hebrews—passages like this: "Jesus had to be made fully human in every way. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (2:17, 18). Another Hebrews passage puts it this way: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (4:15). The truth that Jesus is fully human isn't only essential for our salvation (for God's plan required that the God-Man suffer and die for our sins); it's also of great help and comfort to us in our weaknesses. The God who is our Savior and in whom we believe and trust isn't a God who is unable to relate to us, but he's like us in every way, except that he didn't sin. Jesus experienced everything we experience: our temptation, our guilt, our suffering, and our service. Today, as we attend a funeral in the Jerusalem suburb of Bethany, we find great comfort in this truth about Jesus:

He Is Like Us in Every Way: He Grieves

1. Lazarus' funeral crowd is considerable. We know many of the folks in attendance, for Bethany is a small town. The two sisters sitting in the first pew, Mary and Martha, we know quite well. We notice that Martha keeps looking over her shoulder. "Who's she looking for?" we wonder. In just a moment the answer enters. And when he does, Martha jumps up and rushes to greet him. Had we not known his name, the many whispers we hear would have told us. "It's Jesus!" Every head in the place turns to see him.

Jesus gives Martha a big hug, and she weeps. We wonder what Jesus is going to say and what he's going to do. We've heard the rumors. He commanded storms to be still and demons to be dumb. But what's he going to say about death? Our thoughts are interrupted by Martha's subtle accusation: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." Who can fault her for her frustration? She and Jesus are friends. When Jesus had nowhere else to go, Luke tells us, "Martha opened her home to him" (Lk 10:38). Mary and Martha know Jesus, and they know him well. They know that Jesus loved their brother, for they told the messenger to tell Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick" (Jn 11:3). This is no fan mail request. These two are not shirttail followers of Jesus. They're his friends, his close friends, who need his help.

In fact, they desperately need his help. The Greek language has two different words for sickness. The one describes the presence of a disease; the other describes its effects. Martha uses the latter of the two. A fair translation of her appeal would be, **"Lord the one you love is sinking fast" (Jn 11:3).** In other words, "Lord, hurry!"

Think of it. Dear friends send Jesus an urgent appeal, and they do so in a respectful way. And what does Jesus do? John writes, **"He stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, 'Let's go back to Judea'" (Jn 11:6).** Two days! By the time Jesus finally gets to Bethany, Martha is so broken up that she barely knows what to say. In one breath she blubbers, **"Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."** But in the next she bursts out, **"But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."**

How many Marthas are here today? How many of you, in times of desperation, have cried out to Jesus for help? How many of you, when you've reached the end of your rope and there's nothing else you can do, have begged Jesus to come with his almighty power and restore? Maybe it's a family crisis, maybe it's financial peril, maybe it's a fatal disease. I don't know but, in one way or another, your prayers have echoed Martha's prayer: **"Lord, the one you love is sick" (Jn 11:3).** And Jesus chose not to come—at least, not in the way and not in the timeframe you wanted.

Martha sits in a funk. She's sad, and she's sorrowful. Jesus sits with her. He looks her in the eyes and says, **"Your brother will rise again."** Martha says, **"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."** And Jesus says, **"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."**

Friends, do you hear these words the way Jesus intended them to be heard? Do you hear them coming from a heartless deity who ignores Mary and Martha's tears and is basically telling them, "Death happens, so suck it up and move on"? I don't. I don't because of what Jesus does. In one of the shortest verses in Scripture, John writes, **"Jesus wept" (Jn 11:35).** I see Jesus sitting in the pew between Mary and Martha, putting an arm around each of them, and weeping. He weeps with them, and he weeps for them, just as weeps with us and for us. He weeps so that we'll know that it's not wrong to weep, that mourning isn't disbelieving, that tear-filled eyes don't mean faithless hearts. Jesus' tears give us permission to shed our own. Oh, how he is like us in every way: He grieves; he feels the sadness and emptiness of death.

2. Jesus wipes the tears from Martha's cheeks, gives Mary a big hug, and turns to face the casket. It's closed. He tells the funeral director, "Open it up." At first, he hesitates, but there's something in Jesus' voice that moves him to comply. He turns the tool and lifts the lid. Lazarus' face is waxy and white. My goodness, he's been dead for four days! You think Jesus is going to weep again, but he doesn't. Instead, he speaks. Standing just a few feet from the casket, Jesus calls out in a loud voice, **"Lazarus, come out!"**

We who are preachers always address the living, not the dead. We preach our sermons to audiences that are alive. We share the Bread of Life with those who are breathing. We give our devotions to those who can direct their attention to what we declare. One thing is for sure. There better be a rumble in that casket, or Jesus has been exposed as a fraud. **"Lazarus, come out!"** he shouts. You and I and everyone present at Lazarus' funeral sense movement in the coffin. John says, **"The dead man came out."**

Dead men don't do that, do they? My dad didn't. My father-in-law didn't. My brother didn't. Dead men don't come out. Dead men don't wake up. Dead hearts don't beat. No, dead men don't come out; they won't come out—unless they hear the voice of the Lord of life. When he speaks to the dead, the dead listen. In fact, someone once said, that, had Jesus not addressed Lazarus by name, had he not said, **"Lazarus, come out!"** the tenant of every tomb on earth would have come back from the dead. A little bit earlier in his Gospel, as he speaks of Judgment Day, John puts it this way: **"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice, and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned" (5:28, 29).**

Lazarus jolts up in the casket, John says, **"his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face."** Jesus commands that the grave clothes be removed. Lazarus blinks his eyes and looks around the room as if he's been carted here while he was napping. A woman screams. Another faints dead away. Everyone is shouting. And you and I? We've learned something, haven't we? In fact, we've learned two things. We've learned that Jesus is just like us in that he grieves. He feels our pain, and he feels our sorrow. He cries when we cry. All of this is important, but it's not enough. We've also learned that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and that, by believing in him, we live. In fact, **"whoever lives by believing in him will never die."** And so, what comfort is ours that we don't only have a Savior who grieves death; we have a Savior who gives life.