

Lent Day 21

Friday March 9, 2018

Reading: John 11:1-46

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

Reflection

The above collection of verses always jars me. It uses a logical structure, but the content is so illogical from our perspective. Read it. Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus so when he heard Lazarus was sick he stayed away for two more days. Let's be honest that doesn't work for us. What would work is if he heard a person he loved was deathly ill he would race to them and heal them before the illness could take them. That's an expression of love, Jesus's actions seem to be an expression of coldness.

Once again, let's give Jesus the benefit of the doubt that the things he is doing and saying are exactly according to the will of God. Also, that the author knows what he's talking about, that Jesus truly did love this family. Finally, let's assume based on this that Jesus's determination to wait does in fact reflect the love he has for them. Then what is going on in this story?

Lazarus is ill and is sure to die without help. Fortunately, there is a friend of the family who is a prophet with power to heal. He may even be the Messiah — God's long awaited anointed one who was going to put things right. So the sisters send word as quickly as they can and intone the urgency, reminding Jesus of the love he has for this one as a way to spur him to quick action. Jesus let's his disciples know that as urgent and as grim as things seem this episode will not end in death — but that doesn't mean death won't be a part of it. After all, death is a part of all our stories. Jesus waits and Lazarus dies. The sisters are devastated and then Jesus arrives during the funeral. Finally, Lazarus is raised to life and restored to the sisters. Can you imagine the gift they felt? That moment Lazarus came out of his tomb, alive, healthy, restored? They had let him go, they had said goodbye. Now they have him back.

A shared human experience is that bad things happen all the time. We never know when it will strike us. But, as Christians, we don't have to choose between bad things happening and God's love. God loves us in the midst of bad things happening. And, we know, because God does love us, that he is restoring, healing, and renewing all things and returning them to us as a gift. In short, the pain is temporary and is a gift because we are invited right into the centre of God's renewing work in creation.

Prayer

Bringer of Life, we are grateful for your love. Help us to continue to trust in you during the dark and painful times. Help us to hold onto the hope of your Son who is Lord over all and is renewing all things. Restore to us everything we have lost and hold dear. Amen.