

## The Heart of Christ

John 11:17-44

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Well here we are at the last night of our Lenten Journey. We have examined the Feet, the Eyes, the Hands and the Mouth of Christ. But tonight it is good we saved the heart until last, because the heart is central to all those other parts that we talked about earlier. They each are important, but not as centrally important as the heart. The feet of Christ only can go if the heart is pumping and driving the life blood to the feet to go. You can not take your feet or hands off and lay them aside and expect them to do something. They need the life blood of the heart of Christ to command them to go and walk in the ways of God to reach out in love and grab hold of those who are in need. Eyes can not see with out the heart beating. The mouth says nothing without the heart pounding out the rhythms of life. The heart is the very passion and drive that empowers us to live, to trust, to believe.

This past week on Sunday morning we had heard from the common lectionary John chapter 12, the reading of Mary washing Jesus' feet with rich expansive pure nard. Now we head backwards in our story and hear what drove Mary to express such passion, to show such an outpouring of love. We heard the story of Lazarus rising from the grave at the call of Jesus. We heard how the heart of his sister, Martha was moved to mourning and crying out to Jesus because of the loss of her brother. Her heart was pained, ripped open in despair. But Jesus tells her to have faith, he says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." And when forced, she admits that she puts all her heart and hope in that promise. She opens her heart to faith in Jesus.

Then John tells us we repeat the same heartfelt story with the other sister Mary going to Jesus in tears. Mary crying kneels at Jesus' feet and basically says the same thing, "if you would have been here my brother would not have died." She is feeling that same heart wrenching despair that Martha had expressed.

And then our text takes an interesting turn. Did you notice it when we read it earlier. When Jesus sees Mary weeping and the Jews that came with her weeping, the text tells us that Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. Picture that scene Martha has already been weeping, Mary shows up weeping and crying, the Jews mourning and weeping along side of her and Jesus' heart is opened up. Who could blame him after all, when people you care about are crying and in mourning you naturally open your heart and join in their sorrow it is only human.

And that is what we normally would read into this Gospel text, especially where it reads that Jesus wept, and again where he is greatly disturbed in the spirit.

But let's take a closer look at this text tonight, why exactly was Jesus' heart disturbed. Was it simply out of sympathy for what the sisters have been through? Who amongst us hasn't teared up when someone you care about is crying. It is hard to not cry when people together are weeping. And perhaps these people coming with Mary were paid mourners. Funerals in that time were long – seven days, and the families would hire if they could afford it expert mourners to show the importance and value of the person that had died. So just like how laughter can be contagious, weeping can be contagious also. The mourners are crying, Mary is crying and it would only be natural that Jesus, who cared for Mary, Martha and Lazarus greatly, would open up his heart and cry with her. That would make sense, it is very human, it is very natural.

But that doesn't explain why John tells us twice, right before that and right after this, that Jesus' was greatly disturbed in the spirit. If that meant his heart was upset and mourning it might be easier to explain. But John here is using an image that doesn't translate well into English and sometimes we just assume it meant that Jesus was upset in tears and sadness. But the word really has another entire meaning. It was used three other times in the New Testament. In Matthew 9:30 Jesus sternly warns the blind men not to share what happened. And again in Mark 1:43 Jesus sternly warns the leper not to tell what has happened. And in Mark 14:5 when the people rebuke the woman who anointed Jesus' head with ointment. Do you see a pattern here, it is more about rebuking, anger, stern scolding. One renowned theologian of the last century, Rudolf Bultmann suggested that perhaps Jesus was angry, disturbed by the spirit, because of the lack of faith, the weeping and crying in the midst of the promise of life, the life everlasting is standing right in their midst, the one who has power over life and death has come and yet they weep. If we take it this way, as Bultmann would suggest we have to translate the text more literally to mean that a groan of contempt shuddered through Jesus.

Uuggghhh..... Now that is a different image than someone crying sympathetically with someone they love. So why would Jesus' heart be sighing in contempt, driving him to tears. The only reason could be because of the unbelief. John's Gospel is about signs. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The Light everlasting. The Truth and the Way. Jesus is about to head into Jerusalem soon and rise up on the cross for all people, and yet the closest people to him still have disbelief and misunderstanding. The disciples don't understand it when Jesus says that they should go to Bethany their brother has fallen asleep. The people don't understand that he is going to bring Lazarus back to life so that all can see the glory of God. Martha doesn't understand when she meets him on the road, saying she believes and yet mourns, even when promised that the resurrection is coming. Mary doesn't understand even though she is promised the same everlasting joy. Jesus is about to die so that we might have life and yet

even now his own followers don't get what he is about to do, even today many choose not to believe.

That has to cause the heart of Christ to groan, to be disturbed greatly, to even weep in sadness. God loves us so much that he sends his only son into the world to save the world. Remember that famous line from John chapter 3. Here we are just a few chapters later and yet the people don't understand this great love that pours out from the heart of God to all people. The whole reason God becomes human, is born in Bethlehem, calls his disciples, preaches to the crowds, heals the sick, and travels towards Jerusalem, is so that we might have life out of death, joy out of sadness, light out of darkness, forgiveness out of sinfulness, everlasting peace out of suffering. And yet even when it is happening right before them, even when we preach about this great gift, even when God offers it to all people, many still turn away not believing.

As churches in this community, as individuals in the family of God, we each are given a great gift, the very heart of Christ, who comes to reach out to all people, to show the love of God, to offer forgiveness and life everlasting. We are asked to be the hands of Christ, the feet of Christ, to see and speak like Christ, but first before everything else we need to be filled with the heart of Christ, to be strong in the faith, to receive that blessing, to know God's glory and presence with us in times of struggle and in times of ease, in times of mourning and times of joy. May you be called to believe and hold fast to the faith that is given to you in your baptisms. May you hear and see, touch and follow, in the true blessings of Christ, the Love that pours out from God to each one of us. Hold on to that truth and that faith and share that love with all you meet. Amen.