**February 4th 2024 Sexagesima Sunday**

**Text: John 11:20-27** 0701

**Theme: The Grieving Soul of Faith.**

May each and every one of us be moved by God’s Spirit to approach unto the mercy seat of God, knowing that we have been declared righteous for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, there to receive comfort in the resurrection of the dead. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Recent events within my wife’s family have once again brought to the forefront of our minds the thoughts of our own impending deaths, and along with it of the sin each one of us has committed in thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. Satan, the world, and our 0own sinful flesh loves these moments, for in them they find occasion to continue to accuse us and make begin to lose hope, all comfort being taken away from us. Within the Christian life there are two primary dangers which exist and which Satan ultimately desires to drive us to, they are: security or despair. They are two extremes on opposite ends of the spectrum. Security is when a person, because he knows God is gracious will continue on in his sin thinking that he is at liberty to sin because God forgives him, thereby abusing and making a mockery of God’s grace in Christ Jesus. The other extreme is despair, when one is brought to the point when he thinks that he has sinned too grievously or too much to be forgiven. When we come face to face with death these are the two extremes that we are faced with, for death all too often presents one or the other to us. Now our purpose today is not to determine the eternal dwelling-place of my wife’s mother, for we are not her judge, but as always death of those who are close to us is a reminder to be prepared for the time when we, too, shall depart this life.

With this in mind it is of the highest importance to be battle hardened and prepared to meet the Lord, whether that is at the point of death or at the last day when Christ will return to judge the world in righteousness. This very thing is why so often Jesus would remind us of that impending day and the necessity of being ready. *“Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.” (Matt. 24:42-44)* Here we do not have some idle tale told by our Lord, but a grave and solemn warning. For us we want to be careful not to let His words pass over us without a second thought. As Christians we need to understand the impending and fleeting nature of this life. One moment we are enjoying a steak dinner, the next we are face to face with the Judge of the whole earth. One moment we might be busy with our work and the next we hear the trumpets of God and see the Son of God coming in power and great glory on Judgment Day. Today’s text is a treatise on these very topics and presents to us the grave reality of this life, and the joy of the life to come for those who believe in Jesus Christ to the salvation of their souls. It shows to us the grief of those who truly believe, and the glory of God shining forth and extending also to those who do not believe. The grieving we endure on earth, whether it is due to the loss of one that we love, or if we grieve over the sin we have committed, or whether we fear the death of our bodies due to our flesh, our text presents to us truths which can stave of the two dangers spoken of earlier, and keep the Christian in the faith which saves his soul, in humility, in readiness, on the straight and narrow path of eternal life. It is in this frame of mind that we hear our text for today being found in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse twenty.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we come unto Thee burdened by grief over death and over our own sin and shame. Grant, we pray Thee newness of life that we may no longer unto the lusts of the flesh but in service to Thee. Grant us comfort and hope in the knowledge of sin forgiven for Thy sake alone. Give us peace of conscience in repentance and remission of sins, and help us to bring forth the fruits meet for repentance. Keep us, O Savior, that not one of us be lost due to security or despair, and help us to overcome the temptations of the wicked one. Teach us about the resurrection of our soul and the resurrection of our bodies, finding there the comfort of Thy Gospel. O Lord, be with us this day, that as we study Thy Word that we may receive, by faith, Thy glorious wisdom which teaches and comforts our hearts. Help us to learn to come out to meet Thee in prayer, to commune with Thee, and be thereby strengthened in our trust in Thee. We implore Thee to keep the faithful preaching of Thy Word among us, that, as Amos taught, we do not endure the famine of Thy Word and thereby lose all hope in life and in death. Be Thou our Refuge, our Strength, our Resurrection, and our Life. O Savior grant these things for Thine own name’s sake. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn first that the grieving soul of faith:

1. **Goes out to meet the Lord.** We read verse twenty of our text: **read verse here.** Our text is taken from the middle of the story concerning the death and ultimate bodily resurrection of Lazarus who was the brother of Mary and Martha who we meet in our text. Here Lazarus had died several days earlier, and as sinful humans, Mary and Martha could not understand the silence and inaction of God in such a situation. They had sent to Jesus days before Lazarus had died and told Him Lazarus was sick, but Jesus made no attempt to come and heal their brother. This perplexes them, as we can understand. Only after Lazarus had died did Jesus finally make His way to Bethany, where Mary and Martha lived. It is at the point that Jesus arrives that our text picks up. News reaches both Mary and Martha that Jesus had arrived, and we see two different reactions to the nearness of the Lord that sum up the Christian life. Martha rushes out to meet her Lord, but Mary stays in the house. This is quite striking and presents to us the two different manners which can be present in the Christian at the same time. One is the manner of Mary, who though knowing the Lord was present and available to speak to her, does not go to him, but remains in the house and does not go out to Him. These are similar to those Christians, who though they truly believe, for whatever reason do not go out to meet the Lord in prayer. Maybe they have such overwhelming grief that they doubt their Lord in those extreme circumstances; maybe they harbor guilt in their heart of sin committed; maybe they just think God should not be bothered with these problems. Whatever the reason, the apostle James deals with this hesitation to come unto God by prayer: *“ye have not because ye ask not.” (Jms. 4:2)* And one of our beloved hymns states: “Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer.” (TLH #457:1) This is the very thing that Mary inflicts upon herself, that she need not, for there is an open invitation to every Christian to go out and meet the Lord. Now, because God is gracious, after speaking with Martha, calls Mary unto Him, encouraging her to come, to set aside all those reasons to not go out and meet Him, and to do just that, as Martha had done.

The other example is that of Martha, who immediately goes out to meet Jesus, knowing that hope and comfort can be found ONLY there. The heart of faith yearns to meet the Savior at every opportunity, but our flesh often hinders us, as Jesus told the disciples: *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt. 26:41)* The flesh hinders but faith prompts us to go to Him, and it is often His invitation and promise that moves us to actually go out to meet Him. May the Lord ever move us to go our and meet Him whenever we need to, and especially when we are troubled and grieving. Thus we see that the grieving soul of faith goes out to meet the Lord, and:

1. **Communes with Him.** We read verses twenty one through twenty four of our text: **read verses here.** We now turn our attention to the initial exchange between Martha and Jesus. Martha voices her distress that if Jesus had been there, if He had come when we initially asked, then their brother would not have died. This initial comment is not unlike how we often feel. Lord, you waited too long, it is too late now, we say. Yet, a Christian knows this thought and distress is from his own wicked flesh, for it proceeds not from faith, however the very next words our of her mouth present to us Martha’s faith: yet I know that even now you can do great things. These sayings of Martha are what every Christian thinks and does on a daily basis, and it presents to us the struggle within the Christian between their flesh and their faith. The apostle Paul dealt with this very precisely in the seventh chapter of Romans, let us turn there and read verses 18-25: **read verses here.** It is as if Paul is exposing the inmost motions of our own hearts. It is as if he can look into our minds and see what we are thinking, and truly since the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture, then truly He is presenting to us the truth of ourselves which all too often we are unwilling to admit, that we struggle on a daily basis. We struggle with sin and shame, our faith struggles against our flesh, and often we find ourselves doing the very things that we hate according to faith. Indeed we are wretched and sinful and deserving of damnation! Yet, the beauty of our text is Jesus’ response to her. He does not rebuke her, but rather nourishes her faith which also points our her unbelief. He addresses not her flesh, but her faith and declares in no uncertain terms that her brother shall rise again. He is not here necessarily predicting to her the miracle which He would shortly perform, but rather is more so pointing her to the hope of eternal life and the resurrection of the body on the last day, which in Martha’s case is what gives her comfort and hope concerning her brother. Martha receives this comfort and is reminded of what and where true hope is found and confesses the truth of the resurrection of the dead. Thus does the grieving soul of faith go out to meet the Lord communing with Him:
2. **And is strengthened.** We read verses twenty five through twenty seven of our text: **read verses here.** In response to her confession Jesus proceeds to uplift her faith by teaching her of two basic and fundamental, though all too often forgotten, truths which are key to peace, hope, and comfort for a grieving soul. First He teaches her about spiritual resurrection. Spiritual resurrection is what is termed in Scripture as the first resurrection, and is referring not to the resurrection of the body, but that of the soul, as Jesus’ words to Martha show plainly. It is this resurrection that Jesus speaks of when conversing with Nicodemus concerning being born again and is synonymous with conversion to faith. Jesus is here pointing Mary to the higher truth of spiritual life as opposed to bodily death, that though her brother had dies in the body he was alive in his soul, and was thus saved. It is of far more concern to us to be healthy spiritually than to be healthy bodily, for no matter how healthy we might be in our bodies the fact remains that we still must die, but if we are resurrected spiritually, that is, if we are converted to faith, then we have eternal life. Secondly Jesus teaches her about the second resurrection including the immediacy of heaven upon death. Jesus statement here is one of the most incredible truths which God teaches to man, and it is this: if we believe in Jesus then truly we never die at all. This not because we avoid bodily death, but because for a Christian death is nothing more than entrance into life. Therefore, we need not fear death, at least according to faith. This is the reason why death for a Christian is described in Scripture as sleeping, for truly it is not death at all, but simply resting and waiting for the final redemption in Christ Jesus. By these Jesus comforts the heart of Martha, moving her to go and call her sister so that she too might receive the same from Jesus, and at the same time inviting us to come and receive it as well. This is the truth of God’s Word regarding death, sin, and salvation for the Christian, offering us comfort in grief, hope in our struggle, and peace in our conscience. May each of remember to give thanks unto the Lord this week for each of these things. *“I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.” (Ps.69:30)* Amen.