

Sermon 3/29

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St. Mark's Bridgewater

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good Morning Everyone,

Thank you again for welcoming me to worship this morning with St. Mark's.

These last few weeks have been so disruptive, so challenging, and a whirlwind of emotions, yet it also feels really good to be together worshipping with a familiar, and beautiful liturgy. I was planning to come for a visit in May, and although it's under unfortunate circumstances, I'm happy to meet and be with you all today.

This Lent, it's been interesting to see how the collects, psalms, and readings of the Daily Office and Sunday liturgies have been lining up with what's going on around us. It truly seems that the Holy Spirit is at work in these times, providing comfort when we seek.

The Gospel this morning, I think, is quite relatable. Relatable to what each of us is now experiencing, particularly in such turbulent times. There's lament, grief, and yet still, hope. Lazarus, it says, was loved by Jesus as were Martha and Mary. When Jesus is told that Lazarus was sick, instead of healing, he expresses that he

will be staying longer in the place where he is at. Although we are told why Jesus does not immediately go visit his friends, we can imagine that the loved ones of Lazarus experience his death, the sadness, and the grief. The raising of Lazarus was the last of Jesus' signs in the Gospel of John, yet when he finally heads to visit his friends in their time of grief, he is met by both Mary and Martha. Both lament the loss of Lazarus right to Jesus, wondering why he was not there to prevent Lazarus' death. In my life, and I wonder about others, how many times we have called upon God in a similar way? Maybe we asked Jesus for help or healing, yet maybe it felt like Jesus came a few days too late? There have been times when I prayed so hard for loved ones facing illness or death, or in times of hardship when I called upon God, and in my narrow view, I didn't find the answer I was looking for. It's hard for me to grasp these feelings, yet through faith we believe. Mary and Martha were full of faith and soon after the sisters confide in Jesus, we see the emotions of Jesus flow freely. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, begins to weep. Jesus weeps. He is the incarnation and full of compassion. As Jesus is with those people who loved Lazarus, they are all crying. This image to me is so powerful. The picture of Jesus, weeping with Martha, shows the embodiment of God amongst us. A God that is also upset by death and our own human grief. At our

highs and lows, God is present with us. Never leaving us alone, especially during these times now of physical distancing, the feeling of loneliness, isolation, we must remember that we are never alone. We have an empathetic, loving God that never leaves us.

The passage ends with Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. Again, Jesus empathizes, as he is still overcome with emotion. Jesus praises God and calls out with passion for his friend to return, to rise out of the tomb. Faith can be such a hard thing sometimes, and belief doesn't stop bad things from happening. But we are here and we persevere. In Jesus, we have the promise, the promise of life, light, and resurrection. We too have the hope of glory.

So where does this leave us? In some ways, I wonder if we see ourselves in each of the characters in our Gospel today. Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and even Thomas. We follow God all the way as Thomas did. We have faith to a certain extent sometimes, and often have total faith as Mary and Martha. And as Lazarus, we are resurrected and have our hope of new life.

As we continue in Lent, as Palm Sunday approaches, I wonder how we can continue to find ways to worship God. These times are so different and unlike anything we've seen. Holy Week will be different than ever, and Easter will be a

whole new experience. Yet God is amongst us, working with, and through us.

These new settings have shown me that we can be worshipping God at any and all times of the day. Whether it be Wednesday meditations or Compline before bed, I invite you to find new ways that we may come to find God. And I invite each of you to join in the many offerings we as a Region and a larger community are finding to continue in following Jesus, however they may happen. Despite all the grief and anxiety that is around us, I wonder too if this is also a time where we can slow down, find peace, and be still. A time in a way, for Sabbath, a time for rest. A time to remove ourselves from the endless cycle of news stories bringing out fear and unease. Maybe we can find our place to just be, even for a few moments. I was recently struck by a poem by Wendell Berry, called "The Peace of Wild Things" and I want to close with it. It reads:

When despair for the world grows in me

and I wake in the night at the least sound

in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake

rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things

who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time

I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Amen.