

5th Sunday Lent A (John 11:1-45)

The older you get the faster time seems to go. At least this has been my experience. I suspect that this may be the experience of others as well. How quickly time passes. We say of certain events that they happen "in the twinkling of an eye." At times that description seems to fit even life itself. We are young one day, and then it becomes increasingly obvious that we are growing old. The years have slipped away in the twinkling of an eye.

Perhaps time moves slowly when we're waiting for something. The doctor estimates that surgery will take about two hours. As soon as it's over he will bring you a report. You spend that time pacing the hospital corridor, and you look at the clock every few minutes and wonder if it has stopped. Perhaps that's how Mary and Martha must have felt as they waited for Jesus. Their brother, Lazarus, was sick. His condition grew worse until it became critical. There was no doctor to call and no hospital to which they could take him. Their only hope was to send for Jesus. They did that and all they could do was wait. We don't know how long they waited, but you can be sure that it seemed much longer than it was.

The Gospel doesn't tell us why Jesus delayed. The only thing John tells us is that he waited because he loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. That's the provocative part of the story. He loved, therefore he waited. That's how it is with love, often times it proves to be a waiting game.

Suppose Jesus had been there the moment that Mary and Martha wanted him. It would have saved them some anxiety. It would have spared them some grief. But it would have cost them a lot of faith. I think it would be safe to say that they were never again afraid of death. They had come to know the Lord of life. They had come to know his compassion manifested in his tears, tears that were shed for himself as well, for by his raising of Lazarus, Jesus set himself up for his own death on the cross. They heard him say "I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me though he should die will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die." And Martha believed.

Sometimes our impatience, even impatience with God, may keep us from being gifted by a deeper faith in the Lord of Life, the one who loves us with a passion, the one who raises us up in ways we may not expect, and ultimately, the one who raises us up on the last day. And we gather to give thanks, to give Eucharist, for the one who will never abandon us.

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