

NEEDED LESSONS IN OUR CRISES

(A Pre-Deployment Meditation As Pastor Will Departs To Serve Our Country)

John 11:1-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This past week, in News and Views, Kathy had a quote by James Van Tholen that is powerful. “God comes to us before we go to Him. This is God’s habit. God came to Abraham when there was nothing to come to, just an old man at a dead end. But that’s God for you. That’s the way God likes to work. He comes to old men and to infants, to sinners and to losers. That’s grace.” What precious words!!! God always is able to use the most difficult circumstances to provide His grace, and to teach the greatest lessons. Whatever our cross we are called to bear, that cross is not greater than His grace. In John 8, we learned how Christ used the tragedy of a woman taken in adultery to teach the magnitude of God’s grace and the wisdom of His justice. In John 9, Jesus used the crisis of an excommunicated once blind man to teach of His love and grace for those who refuse to deny Him and who aren’t afraid to say so. In John 10, Jesus used the crisis of being faced with death by stoning to teach us the constant need for extending a loving invitation to the lost to believe. Now in John 11, Jesus faced the terminal illness of a man He dearly loved, and doubtless, this crisis holds more lessons of Christ’s love and grace than almost all the other crises in the first eleven chapters of John’s Gospel.

For the setting, remember that Jesus had been preaching and teaching in Perea, across the Jordan River to the east of Jerusalem for some time. Many were believing in Jesus and being baptized there in the Jordan River. Thus, it is interesting to note that the message came from Bethany to Perea beyond the Jordan River, which was probably in those days, by walking, about a day’s travel away, and the message was that Lazarus, Jesus’ dear friend was terminally ill. John made it certain that we do not confuse this Lazarus of Bethany with the man named Lazarus in the story of the rich man and Lazarus recorded in Luke 16:19-31. This village of Bethany was well known as the home of Mary, Martha, and their brother, Lazarus of Bethany. John seems to take it for granted that his readers may well have read the beautiful story of this Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus with a whole alabaster flask of pure nard or spikenard written of in Mark 14:3-9. Our text in John 11:2 identifies this otherwise unidentified woman in the house of the Simon, once a leper who hosted a meal for Jesus in Bethany. John tells us it was this dear friend of Jesus who came into that house and anointed her Lord with ointment and wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair. Also, John records in a message we will come to in John 12 about Mary of Bethany showing this act of loving extravagance.

John reveals much to us in John 11 about Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany for our text reveals these two sisters mentioned in Luke’s account of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 are the same sisters. Remember it was this Martha who was overly concerned with preparing a meal for Jesus to eat with His disciples, while Jesus was speaking with His disciples and this very same Mary, rather than helping Martha get the food ready and serving it, she was seated at Jesus’ feet, taking in every word He spoke. Now, it is the brother of these two famous sisters in

Bethany, Lazarus who was deathly sick, ready to die. Lazarus is an abbreviation of the name, Eleazar and it means, "He whom God helps/helped." That is our setting. Mary and Martha sent a messenger from Bethany, to tell Jesus in Perea that Lazarus was sick. In the face of this life and death crisis, our Lord taught four tremendous lessons to His disciples which all of us need to learn/relearn today!

JESUS' LESSON IS THAT THE GLORY OF THE SON OF GOD IS THAT HE KNOWS THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE FOR SICKNESS AND DEATH.

(I.) Notice John 11:4. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Death is not the final purpose and outcome of sickness for believers. When Jesus heard Lazarus was sick, He said, "This illness does not lead to death. As Today's English Version rightly translates this, Jesus said, "The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus." Rather, Jesus said, "The final outcome of Lazarus' illness will be that the Son of God will be glorified. No, doubt after the one-day trip to Jesus from Bethany and the one-day trip back, Mary and Martha heard this baffling message after the death of Lazarus, saying, "This illness is not unto death, or the final outcome is not death for Lazarus, but glory for the Son of God. I can't tell you how these two sisters accepted Jesus' message, but I see in the baffling message a ray of hope shining across the sister's lives.

This ray of hope was in Martha's voice in verse 22. She told Jesus, "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give You." In sickness and death, God deeply desires us to keep hope alive hope, believing that death will not be the final episode/outcome when death comes. When death happens, God still plans to glorify Himself in our death and others. Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus. He knew His coming miracle would bring the hostility of the Pharisees to a boiling point, leading them to crucify Him. There on the cross dying for us, Jesus would be glorified by being obedient to His Father. The death and raising of Lazarus led to Jesus' finest hour. When the Pharisees saw that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, they said, "If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Three Sundays ago, on July 7th, a 33-year-old Medical Doctor (Andre) was serving alongside the Ukraine military. He was critically wounded while traveling to his Triage Center in a clearly marked RED CROSS ambulance while treating an injured soldier. A Russian drone struck the ambulance. Andre was covered in shrapnel. Fifteen days later this born-again Doctor went to his heavenly home and was ultimately healed. Paul Beech knows well his younger sister and older brother-Ukraine Ministry leaders and part of Keys Connections. Before the war, Andre served as a medical Dr. near Kyiv, Ukraine. When the war started, the hospital he worked at became overrun with civilian and military patients. A year ago, Andre was commissioned by the military. He's been a Triage Dr. near the front battle lines ever since. Please pray as the War continues. Join me today in thanking God that death is not the final episode of Andre's life, and that God will use Andre's death to glorify the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

JESUS' LESSON IS THAT OUR STRONGEST APPEAL TO HIM WHEN WE NEED HELP OR HEALING IS TO APPEAL TO HIS LOVE. (II.)

There is no appeal stronger than an appeal to Christ's love. The messenger's only words in John 11:2. "So the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, he whom You love is ill." There is no appeal for help or healing that is any stronger than an appeal to Christ's love. We may wisely claim promises in the Word of God that the Lord directs, and we should claim His promises as David often did in the Psalms. Yet this message from Martha and Mary to Jesus had no plea for healing, no cry for mercy, but only a word of information, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." These sisters never asked the obvious question, "Would you come and heal our brother?" They knew in their souls Jesus would come. Jesus never abandons those whom He loves. Whatever your prayer is in the future for a loved one or for yourself, don't forget to appeal to Christ's love. When you are lying sick in bed, don't be afraid to pray, "Lord the one whom You love is sick." There is no higher appeal to God than to His love. God is love and this love led Jesus to die for us at Calvary. You may say, "But I'm not a perfect Christian: I doubt the Jesus loves me all that much!?" You're wrong.

Notice verse 5. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." They weren't perfect followers of Jesus. Martha often was too busy working for Jesus, making meals, that she didn't have time to listen to Jesus. Mary was a woman who loved Jesus, and she dropped her work when He was around to sit at His feet to hear His Word. Mary sometimes left Martha's side to help her prepare meals to sit at Jesus' feet. And as for Lazarus, he is the most non-descript individual, with nothing said about him to describe him. He came and went in his home in Bethany, he ate and slept, and listened to neighbors tell him Jerusalem news, and we have no words in the Bible recorded about what he did or said. After he was raised from the dead, in John 12:2, there was a dinner given for him, but he never spoke a word or give a testimony about life after burial. All we know is that he showed up for the dinner in his honor and many came to see him. How did Jesus love Lazarus? Just like He loved Martha and Mary. Jesus' love was not based on their natures, but on Jesus' nature. Jesus loves us no matter what our personality is like. And He always feels it deeply when we are sick, or when we lose a loved one. We can always appeal to His love. We can pray, "Lord, that couple You love out in Superior, Bill and Annie, are facing sickness right now." "Lord, Mike Shaw whom You love has a dangerous problem with his left eye." "Lord, that Army Chaplain, Pastor Will that You love is being deployed to the Middle East today." "Lord, that couple You love are angry, lying, and fighting." "Lord, that narcissistic man that you love is fighting off Your conviction." "Lord, that woman You love longs to conceive and have a baby." "Lord, that couple You love are running away from Your will. Lord, those single your people You love need a spouse." Jesus knows what to do.

JESUS' LESSON IS THAT HIS TIMING OFTEN BAFFLES OUR MINDS BECAUSE ONLY HE CAN SEE WHAT'S BEST FOR OUR FUTURE. (III.)

We read about what seems like a cruel delay in John 11:6-7. "So, when He heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was. Then, after this, He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." From our vantage point as readers of the Word, for Jesus to stay put where He was in Perea for two

more days after the report of Lazarus apparent terminal illness, seems cruel, and can seem at first sight, to negate Jesus' love for Lazarus completely. If we could know the facts, it probably was such that by the time the messenger arrived in Perea, Jesus knew Lazarus had already died. To say Jesus never cared is alien to the love of my Lord. Lazarus may well have died shortly after the Bethany messenger was sent—that is Day 1. Probably late on Day 1 or early on Day 2, the messenger arrived in Perea to tell Jesus the one He loved was ill. Jesus then remained on Day 2 and 3 where He was, and then He took the one-day trip on Day 4 to Bethany. If this scenario is so, Jesus probably arrived on Day 5, following Lazarus being buried late on Day 1 or early on Day 2. Since Jesus could not get to Bethany before Lazarus died, knowing He was going to raise him from the dead, Jesus did not hurry for a good reason. That reason must well have been Jesus' desire to get there 4 days late so that Lazarus' body would have started to decompose and stink. We know Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus, Luke 8:41-56 and she had only been dead for a few hours. Jesus also had raised the son of the widow of Nain who had been dead for no longer than a day, Luke 7:11-16. Jesus' delay wasn't cruel at all. His delay was in love, tender love to allow His miracle to convince many unbelievers so they might believe which happened. Beloved, how often have we seen God's delays as cruel, when in tender love, His timing is always perfect, and His delays are always wise and bathed in love for you and me.

JESUS' LESSON IS THAT HIS MISSION/OUR MISSION IS TO OBEY THE FATHER'S CALL IN SPITE OF THE DANGERS OR DIFFICULTIES.

(IV.) Notice verse 8. When Jesus said, "Let us go to Judea again," His disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?" Obviously, for Jesus and all of us, if we walk in the light of God's plan for us, we need never fear and we will never fail. The disciples could not believe Jesus would venture going back to Jerusalem after knowing when He was there last, certain death awaited Him. Why was Jesus going back to Jerusalem if Lazarus was dead? Beloved, the hour had arrived for Jesus to set His face toward Jerusalem to go to the cross. Going to Judea was to face the cross, to obey the Father, and Jesus was returning to Jerusalem to obey His Father's call.

I entitled our message, "NEEDED LESSONS IN OUR CRISIS." I am not only referring to the crisis of Pastor Will's deployment. I am referring also to the crisis in our church of facing pastoral losses. Last July we had four pastors of our once five member staff of pastors. Then Pastor Larry died and went Home to Jesus on August 14, 2023, We were down to three pastors. After pastoring us for 19 years as our Pastor of Worship and Small Groups, on May 19th, Pastor Kevin resigned, leaving us with two pastors. Today, following our evening service as Pastor Will is being deployed, we are down to one pastor. What lessons must we learn? I am counting on us remembering what I want to speak on for a few moments in this last lesson about Jesus' mission and our mission to obey the Father's call. At this time, we are three months into our diligent pastoral search, but I challenge us to think for a few moments, "What is the mission of our church?" I am asking for as many of you as possible to go home and sometime this week, write down in a sentence the

mission of our church. Then encourage our Moderator Mike Shaw with your definition. I will ask him to share these definitions with me as well. What is our mission as a church. I took the challenge and wrote down what God brought to my mind and heart. “The mission of Rock Springs Evangelical Free Church (which should guide all our future including our pastoral search) is to fulfill Christ’s great commission and hasten His return.” It thrilled me inside just to express in my own words why we exist in Rock Springs. When Jesus said, “Let us go to Judea again, “He was facing God the Father’s eternal mission which could not escape Calvary—John 3:16 tells us, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” If we write out our divine mission, it will tell us what to do and what not to do as we face our future. Our mission should serve to define what we do the rest of this summer, this fall, this next spring, into next summer.

What if we measured our ministry here by keeping our mission out in front of our board decisions, out in front of our worship services, our preaching, our teaching, our witnessing, and our planning for the future? Then I ventured for myself and my job, and you could venture for yourself in your job in our church. I ventured, “Why, Lord, do You have me here shepherding the Rock Springs Evangelical Free Church? As I assessed why God brought me here and has kept me here into my 48th year, I wrote, “Lord, You have me here in Rock Springs Evangelical Free Church to preach the whole counsel of God so as to win the lost to Jesus, to pastor, shepherd, mentor, disciple, and counsel this flock of God to practice Christ’s presence in all of our lives, to teach us all to live in the liberty of God’s Holy Spirit, enjoying the unity of our statement of faith that welcomes all sinners to Christ, and welcomes all Christians from all backgrounds to testify of the Gospel to unbelievers and to fellowship as born-again believers around the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper until Jesus returns.” This is My divine summons.

Jesus heard the divine summons that sent him to Judea. Pastor Will, you heard in your call to Army Chaplaincy, not only our country’s call to serve in the middle east, but God’s call to head to Casper tonight, then Ft. Riley, Kansas, soon, and then, in a few weeks, overseas to the Middle East. Some of us sense God’s call and we are fulfilling it. Others of us have started to follow God’s call, but we’ve pulled off the road, waiting for a new call, or still debating the value of our prior call. Oswald Chambers wrote, “If you want insight into what Jesus Christ teaches, you can only get it by obedience. Spiritual darkness comes because of something we do not intend to obey. No one ever receives a word from God without instantly being put to the test over it. We disobey and wonder why we don’t go on spiritually. At the risk of being thought fanatical, you must obey what God tells you.” As I look at Jesus willingness to face death for us and to die for us, I see our mission as a church as being faithful to each other/brothers/sisters. That is the crisis every church faces. We need each other. Putting off each other, refusing to work together with a spouse, a child, a brother or a sister is a tragic mistake that will come back to haunt us, because opportunity does not always knock twice. Jesus’ disciples followed Him to Judea. Do we live out what we sing. “Where You go, I’ll go, where You stay, I’ll stay, when You move, I’ll move, I will follow You.” Amen.