

March 3rd, 2019

Scripture:

John 11: 1-44

“Signs and Wonders: Sign #7.”

Today we conclude our journey through the 7 signs in John’s Gospel.

And sign #7 is the crescendo ----- in a certain sense it all comes to a head with the raising of Lazarus ---- as it is a foreshadowing --- a nudge nudge wink wink ---- a giant arrow pointing to and anticipating the cross itself.

And like the cross ---- as Jesus says today in verse 4 from John’s Gospel ---- like the cross ---- the raising of Lazarus ----- “Is for God’s glory.”

In a very real sense that is the life of Christ summed up in one sentence ----- “...it is for God’s glory.”

All 7 of the signs in John’s Gospel point to God’s glory ----- and none more than the raising of Lazarus.

What appears to already be over and done --- a fait accompli -----Lazarus is dead ---- is really just a beginning.

From a worldly perspective Lazarus is past history --- he’s already been dead for 4 days.

Verse 17 ---- “On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.”

Can you imagine the stench --- four days of human decomposition doesn’t bode well for the nostrils.

Verse 39 ---- Martha says ---- “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been in there four days.”

It’s already over ---- he’s dead --- he’s decomposing ----- he’s rotten ---- he’s lost.

But of course not so with God.

It's never too late with God.

And remember Jesus took His time getting there --- back in verse 6 we read -
--- "So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two
more days."

This in part is why Martha says in verse 21 --- "Lord, if you had been here,
my brother would not have died."

There was opportunity for Jesus to get there before Lazarus had died.

But clearly Jesus was in no hurry.

God was going to be glorified --- not through a healing ----- God was going
to be glorified through a resurrection from the dead ---- just like the cross ---
and so Jesus has another timeline in mind.

And just as the cross is a heightened moment where God was at work ----- so
it is here with Jesus and Lazarus --- God is working in ways unseen

So often in scripture we see that God has a timing all His own ---
---- the Exodus --- the Exile --- and remember the Exodus and the Exile are
2 completely different events ---- the Exodus --- The Exile ---- Abraham and
Sarai ---- the birth of Moses ----- David and Goliath ---- Elijah --- Elisha ----
Joshua ----- the Virgin birth ----- John the Baptist ----- Paul ---- the
crucifixion --- the resurrection --- the post resurrection appearances ---- the
ascension ----- and the list goes on.

God has a timing all His own --- and for His glory.

Lazarus is but another example of how sometimes the timing of God appears
to be out of sync with human timing.

Despite how it may appear Jesus isn't late in John 11 --- yes it's been four
days since Lazarus has died ---- yes there is an odor ---- yes He could saved
Lazarus but now he's dead ---- and yet at the same time Jesus is right on
time ---- not a second too early and not a second too late --- right on time.

Joel 2 --- verse 25 ---- just may be the most powerful line in all of scripture when it comes to God's timing ----- it reads ---

“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—
the great locust and the young locust,
the other locusts and the locust swarm —
my great army that I sent among you.”

“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—“

There is no such thing as wasted time when it comes to God's plan --- God's timing ---- God's glory.

God is always right on time ----- even if we can't recognize or understand it ---- God's timing is always perfect.

Jesus was right on time in John's Gospel today.

He wasn't a day late ---- He wasn't 4 days late ---He wasn't even a second too late.

He was right on time.

“When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.”

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” ----- verse 4-7 from John's Gospel today.

“This sickness will not end in death.

No, it is for God's glory.

“Let us go back to Judea.”

Instead of going to help a very very good friend who is sick ---- Jesus turns the other way and heads back to Judea.

And then the next verse --- just to drive the point home ----- verse 8 ----

“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

So it's --- a good friend is sick and needs you ----- why don't we go to help him.

And Jesus says --- no ----- don't worry about it he won't die ---- this is happening for God's glory --- let's head back to the place where they tried to kill me --- and then we'll go visit our friend.

God's timing ----- God's glory ---- can look very peculiar at times --- if we're looking at it through human lenses.

David verses Goliath looks peculiar ----- hopeless even.

The Israelites ---- Pharaoh's army --- the Red Sea --- looks peculiar --- hopeless even.

Gideon and the Midianites ---- near Moreh ----- looks peculiar --- hopeless even.

Elisha --- at Dothan ----- surrounded by the enemy --- looks peculiar --- hopeless even.

Jeremiah --- the Jews in exile ---- buying a field at Anathoth ---- looks peculiar ----- hopeless even.

Jesus --- betrayed --- mocked --- beaten ----- spat upon ----- crucified in the public square for all to see ----- looks peculiar ---- hopeless even.

And the list goes on.

God's timing ----- God's glory ---- has a mind ---- and a rhythm --- and a reality all its own --- and we can't fight it --- and we can't explain it ---- we simply have to give over to it ---- and follow it.

As Jesus Himself said ----- "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."

God has a timetable all His own --- that isn't made available to us ---- ever.

And so we trust.

And to use words a little more contemporary ---- I prefer trust ---- but more contemporary words might be --- “we give God the benefit of the doubt”.

We give God the benefit of the doubt ----- we position ourselves in such a way that we show we believe in Him even when the results and the circumstances seem to point otherwise.

But the question is ----- do we really?

Do we really trust God? ---- do we really give God the benefit of the doubt?

Most of the time if we're honest the answer is NO --- we don't.

No --- we don't trust Him and no we don't give Him the benefit of the doubt.

Sure we do when all is well and we're happy and clappy.

But when things start to falter a wee bit ----- suddenly we're uncertain again.

Suddenly it's ----- “Well I'm not so sure about this.”

Anyone can trust and have faith when things are going well that's not trust or faith at all.

When the wheels get wobbly and the engine putters a bit --- then where are we? ---- that's the real question.

Jesus says over and over and over again that following Him will be a huge challenge.

Matthew 8 verse 18- 22 read -----

“When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

In other words ----- when you follow Jesus you can say good bye to comfort and you can say good bye to cultural customs and practices --- you can say good bye to the norm.

And then there is Luke 14 verse 25 and 26 ---

“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters --- yes, even their own life ---- such a person cannot be my disciple.”

You can't make it any clearer that following Jesus will call for a complete re-ordering of your life --- no looking back.

Another good one on discipleship is --- Luke 9 verse 62 ---- one of my personal favourite's ---

“Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

And then of course there is Luke 9 verse 23 and 24 -----

“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

Clearly following Jesus involves a complete reversal of priorities.

The way of the world and the way of Christ are often ---- very often ----- in conflict.

Indeed Jesus puts it about bluntly as possible in Luke 16 verse 15 ----

“He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.”

“What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.”

You can't be any more blunt than that.

“What people value highly is detestable in God’s sight.” ---- and this is Jesus speaking.

Powerful words ---- controversial words ---- uncomfortable words.

So what are we to make of all of this.

God’s timing.

God’s glory.

What people value being detestable to God.

People dying ----- rotting way for 4 days before God arrives and finally doing something to help them.

What are we to make of this peculiar ---- counter intuitive ---- miraculous --- loving and saving God who does these curious and challenging things that sometimes even make us uncomfortable ---- things we cannot possibly understand or sometimes even agree with.

The answer of course is simple ---- just go along with Him.

Just trust Him.

Just praise and glorify and worship Him.

Just give way to Him.

Submit to Him.

Obey Him.

And do all of this not because it makes sense.

And do all of this not because it’s always going to feel good.

And do all of this not because it will make you popular or liked --- or loved or whatever.

Do it because it is faithful ---- and good and true ---- and for no other reason that that.

In the middle of our passage is this great glimmer of hope.

Verse 22 --- “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

That’s Martha to Jesus today ----- “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

And this right after she says ---- “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

This woman is torn --- her brother just died --- and if Jesus had of hurried up and gotten there a few days earlier instead of hanging around people who wanted to kill Him --- her brother would still be alive.

She’s torn ----- her brother just died --- but ---- she also knows that Jesus can do anything.

Isn’t that us too?

Aren’t we torn when things happen in our lives that we struggle with? ----- the death --- or maybe near death of a loved one ---- sometimes worse --- watching people make foolish decision after foolish decision in their lives --- - over and over again --- sometimes death is easier than repeated pain and foolishness.

It can be painful to watch people make poor choice after poor choice after poor choice.

Just as painful as it must be for Jesus to watch us sometimes --- even as we think we’re pretty good.

But then there is Martha ----- with her beautiful words ----

“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Nothing is beyond God's glory --- and Martha knows this.

Nothing is beyond God's reach.

Nothing is irreparable.

Lost ---- missed opportunities don't exist when it comes to God ---- He can change --- alter --- go back ----- and fix anything.

Joel 2 verse 25 ----- "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—"

Lazarus isn't dead --- he's just having a little snooze.

And he's having a snooze --- not because Jesus lost focus for a day or two or three or four --- he's shaving a snooze so that God might be glorified through this apparent guffaw and tardiness.

"Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory..."
---- verse 4 today.

Our job is to glorify God.

And to rest assured of His great and saving love for us.

To trust Him.

Our job is to say ---- and really believe that despite the fact that we want to say things like

"If you had been here Jesus this wouldn't have happened..." ----- our job is to say ---- and truly believe it ---- "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Just because it didn't happen the way we think it should have happened ----
- doesn't mean it didn't happen the way God thinks it should have happened.

Just because it didn't happen the way we think it should have happened ----
- doesn't mean it didn't happen the way God thinks it should have happened.

We don't know better.

We don't know better than God does --- so if we truly trust Him we have to let go.

Look at the very end of our passage today ----

“Come out.” ---- Jesus called in a loud voice.

“Lazarus Come out.”

That's what Jesus says in verse 43 today.

And that is also what Jesus says to each and every one of us as well.

“Come out.”

The last 2 verses from John's Gospel today go this way -----

“When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

“Come out” --- and ----- “take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

That's Jesus in His own words today.

We are all shackled by the ways of this world --- the grave clothes of this world that hinder us --- we act like we're already defeated.

Jesus is forever calling us to come out of our fleshly and worldly feelings and cocoons of comfort ---- to glorify Him and give way to Him --- submit to Him ---- and obey Him.

If we act like we're already defeated --- we are already defeated.

Lent --- which we will enter into next week ----- is all about shedding.

Shedding grave clothes --- worldly clothes and walking in a new way as we prepare ourselves for the greatest act of God's glory ever ----- the cross.

All 7 signs that we have spent the last 7 weeks walking through point to one thing --- God's glory ---and God's glory alone.

And in the end God's glory is really all about the cross.

All the rest of John's Gospel --- after the 7 signs ---- which we wrap up today ----- all the rest of John's Gospel is the book of glory --- the journey to and the reality and the beauty of the cross.

As we close today ---- 2 last things.

1. --- If you want to meet Jesus ---- go to the cross ---- there you will find Him.

And if you want to meet Jesus again ---- go the cross ----- because there you'll find Him.

And 2. ---- if you want to understand the importance of the cross ---- and you're wondering how to get to the cross to meet Him ----- read John chapters 14 to 21 ---- and then read the beginning of 1Corinthians.

These are 2 point blank take aways --- action items --- for today.

If you want to meet Jesus ---- go to the cross --- and if you want to get to the cross but you're uncertain of how ---- read the back end of John's Gospel --- - chapters 14-21 and then turn to 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2.

Just because it didn't happen they way we think it should have happened ---- doesn't mean it didn't happen the way God thinks it should have happened.

We don't know better than God.

“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory...”

It's all about God's glory.

Lazarus --- the cross ---- the Gospel --- all of it is about God's glory.

And so may we praise Him --- and honour Him ---- and give way to Him ----
trusting in Him --- knowing that He knows better than we do.

And so ----- To God be the glory now and forever.

Amen.