

## Jesus Wept

John 11:1-7: <sup>1</sup> A man named Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, became sick. Bethany was the town where Mary and her sister Martha lived. (<sup>2</sup> This Mary was the one who poured the perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was sick.) <sup>3</sup> The sisters sent Jesus a message: "Lord, your dear friend is sick." <sup>4</sup> When Jesus heard it, he said, "The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory." <sup>5</sup> Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days. <sup>7</sup> Then he said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

Sometimes, I believe we let the miracle of Jesus' birth, as God's only begotten Son, get in the way of the Gospel story. When we follow the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son, through Galilee, we look for the miracles to continue. Those footsteps lead us on an extraordinary path as an ordinary child of God. However, I am afraid that all too often, we mix up God's miracles with our perceived miracles which may be infected by human "magic." Miracles are acts by God, as well as acts empowered by God's Spirit that can be performed by humans. Magic is the act of a human being to amaze other human beings as entertainment or to fool them by sleight of hand. People often confuse miracles and magic. For some, it is hard to tell the difference between the two. Sometimes they look the same to the human eye, but they are almost opposite in their purpose. The illusion of magic is meant to distract the human eye from reality, while miracles draw the human eye to a special kind of reality. The best way to describe that special reality is to say it approaches a mythical reality – that is a reality that is defined as a "really real reality" that takes us to an understanding beyond our normal human capabilities. Miracles reveal a deeper understanding of our spiritual connection to the world, to each other and to our triune God. On the other hand, magic is a skill practiced repeatedly, until the art has reached human perfection, so that it hides the human action to amaze you with the end results. Miracles are the work of our Creator and are an expression of God's continual creative power. Miracles are our gift from God, while magic is a practice art of the magician.

Why would I use a discussion of miracles versus magic as a preamble to John 11:1-7? The resurrection of Lazarus is a miracle by our triune God. I prefer not to fragment the Trinity by separating out which actions were taken by God and which actions were taken by Jesus. That also includes what "communication" or enlightenment was given by God to the human side of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Those are beyond the scope of my ability to understand, but I do believe that the Lazarus Story is a miracle and not the magic of a magician's sleight of hand. The Scripture says, "When Jesus heard it, he said, 'The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory.'" I believe this is a strong faith statement by Jesus, to communicate how our triune God was going to perform the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection. It also draws "Amazing Grace" attention to Jesus as the Son of God – without human sleight of hand. The most significant question we can ask, "What was Jesus' most important role in this miracle?" I believe his role was to continue doing what he had been doing all along – love Lazarus and his family!

<sup>6</sup> "Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days." I have been waiting two days for the Holy Spirit to give me insight and guidance for understanding verse 6. As your pastor or chaplain, you would expect me to rush right over. It is also be what I would expect of myself. So why would Jesus wait two days? I don't have a clue in the "really real reality" of this world. But from a mythical standpoint, let me draw your attention to another resurrection story (especially now in this corona virus world, where we are praying at this Eastertime for the resurrection of humanity). The story of Jairus's daughter.

## Another Sea Story

Mark 5:21-43: <sup>21</sup> Jesus went back across to the other side of the lake. There at the lakeside a large crowd gathered around him. <sup>22</sup> Jairus, an official of the local synagogue, arrived, and when he saw Jesus, he threw himself down at his feet <sup>23</sup> and begged him earnestly, "My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!" <sup>24</sup> Then Jesus started off with him. So many people were going along with Jesus that they were crowding him from every side. <sup>25</sup> There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years, <sup>26</sup> even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better she got worse all the time. <sup>27</sup> She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him, <sup>28</sup> saying to herself, "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well." <sup>29</sup> She touched his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that she was healed of her trouble. <sup>30</sup> At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" <sup>31</sup> His disciples answered, "You see how the people are crowding you;

why do you ask who touched you?"<sup>32</sup> But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.<sup>33</sup> The woman realized what had happened to her, so she came, trembling with fear, knelt at his feet, and told him the whole truth.<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to her, "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your trouble."<sup>35</sup> While Jesus was saying this, some messengers came from Jairus' house and told him, "Your daughter has died. Why bother the Teacher any longer?"<sup>36</sup> Jesus paid no attention to what they said, but told him, "Don't be afraid, only believe."<sup>37</sup> Then he did not let anyone else go on with him except Peter and James and his brother John.<sup>38</sup> They arrived at Jairus' house, where Jesus saw the confusion and heard all the loud crying and wailing.<sup>39</sup> He went in and said to them, "Why all this confusion? Why are you crying? The child is not dead—she is only sleeping!"<sup>40</sup> They started making fun of him, so he put them all out, took the child's father and mother and his three disciples, and went into the room where the child was lying.<sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha, koum," which means, "Little girl, I tell you to get up!"<sup>42</sup> She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.) When this happened, they were completely amazed.<sup>43</sup> But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and he said, "Give her something to eat."

What a story for debate teams! The "Pros" are going to say, "It was a miracle; Jesus brought her back to life – it's never too late for Jesus to perform a miracle." While the "Cons" are going to say, "Jesus knew all along that she was only sleeping, but he performed this "sleight of hand" trick to amaze the people. That is also why Jesus told the father, the mother and the three disciples not to tell anyone." The "Pros" would also say, "Jairus's daughter was surely dead or the messengers would have not gone to the trouble to tell the father." The "Cons" would say, "Was there a Doctor there to pronounce her dead? I think not, so obviously she was not dead! It's like Jesus said 'She was only sleeping. There's no miracle, no amazing grace here.'" For the "Pros" and the "Cons" of this world, what I have to say to you is this, "A same day resurrection leaves the world open to the back and forth of the "Pros" and the "Cons" as to whether or not Jairus's daughter was "really" dead. I actually had an experience many years ago in the Malcom Randall VAMC (this is not a sea story – it really, really happened), where a veteran was pronounced dead by a doctor. In the VA, you were allowed to keep the deceased in the hospital room for up to 2 hours, while you wait for family to visit. This veteran's family had gone to the canteen for lunch. They were called back and met with the doctor before going into the room, so they wouldn't be surprised by their loved one's death. But, Oh, were they surprised! About 5 minutes after they arrived at his bedside, the veteran began to stir. Who knows whether it was a near death experience, a mis-pronouncement or a resurrection miracle? The only plausible explanation the family could give was that it was a miracle – magic was never mentioned. Of course, the "Cons" would say. "The doctor made a mistake."

A same day resurrection, like the resurrection of Jairus' daughter, will always have a multitude of doubters – but the family believed. Maybe that explains why there is only one recorded doubter after a wait of three days for the Resurrection of Jesus. Jesus' empty tomb was all it took for his living family of disciples and friends to believe. Yet, the poor old Doubting Thomas' are still looking for the magic wand!

When you write a sermon with no restrictions, there is no limit on how long it is, because much there is no time limit as there is with a verbal delivery. You can go into all the depth and details you need to get your point across. The point I want to make with the introduction you have just endured is simply, "Let God perform the miracles we experience in life, pray to be a part of those miracles and leave the magic to the doubters!"

Resurrection comes with recovery after you died!

John 11:8-45: <sup>8</sup> "Teacher," the disciples answered, "just a short time ago the people there wanted to stone you; and are you planning to go back?" <sup>9</sup> Jesus said, "A day has twelve hours, doesn't it? So those who walk in broad daylight do not stumble, for they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But if they walk during the night they stumble, because they have no light." <sup>11</sup> Jesus said this and then added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go and wake him up." <sup>12</sup> The disciples answered, "If he is asleep, Lord, he will get well." <sup>13</sup> Jesus meant that Lazarus had died, but they thought he meant natural sleep. <sup>14</sup> So Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> but for your sake I am glad that I was not with him, so that you will believe. Let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> Thomas (called the Twin) said to his fellow disciples, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!" <sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Judeans had come to see Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother's death. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died! <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for."<sup>23</sup> "Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her. <sup>24</sup> "I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day."<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the

world.”<sup>28</sup> After Martha said this, she went back and called her sister Mary privately. “The Teacher is here,” she told her, “and is asking for you.”<sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up and hurried out to meet him. (<sup>30</sup> Jesus had not yet arrived in the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.)<sup>31</sup> The people who were in the house with Mary comforting her followed her when they saw her get up and hurry out. They thought that she was going to the grave to weep there.<sup>32</sup> Mary arrived where Jesus was, and as soon as she saw him, she fell at his feet. “Lord,” she said, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”<sup>33</sup> Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved.<sup>34</sup> “Where have you buried him?” he asked them. “Come and see, Lord,” they answered.<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.<sup>36</sup> “See how much he loved him!” the people said.<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?”<sup>38</sup> Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance.<sup>39</sup> “Take the stone away!” Jesus ordered. Martha, the dead man's sister, answered, “There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!”<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, “Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?”<sup>41</sup> They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, “I thank you, Father, that you listen to me.<sup>42</sup> I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me.”<sup>43</sup> After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”<sup>44</sup> He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and with a cloth around his face. “Untie him,” Jesus told them, “and let him go.”<sup>45</sup> Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him.

Resurrection comes with recovery after you died! There are many ways to die physically, but it is usually only a one-time event – with the exception of near-death experiences. However, mentally and spiritually, death can be a recurring event. Any traumatic or prolonged crisis in our lives can kill the person we were mentally or spiritually. A feeling of being born again is usually the beginning of recovery – it makes you feel like you have been resurrected to new life. To feel emotionally dead is a real death. When I was in seminary, learning how to do pastoral care, being a caregiver was about helping the ones you are caring for to discover how they feel. When you discover honestly how you feel, then you find support from others, but especially, you begin to support yourself. Being able to express your feelings starts your road to recovery. From my own personal experience that takes resurrection, which is God's miracle for each of us!

For crying out loud is a call from deep within us to let the tears flow, when our hearts, mind and bodies are broken. I can remember desperate days in my life when I prayed for the tears to flow. My brother Jim, then my mother's parents, and my dad's mother were all killed. When my dad's mother was murdered, my grandmother, then my tears dried up. No longer would the tears roll down my cheeks. It was like a dam was built in my eyes to hold the tears inside and I was slowly drowning. It seemed like each close family death made it harder for the tears to flow from my eyes to relieve the pressure building inside me. They were all deaths dealt to me with a crushing message delivered – one moment my loved one was alive, the next moment my loved one was dead. I died back then – I was still breathing and still walking, but believe me, when I tell you I died back then. My resurrection was not magic, it was God's miracle through Jesus Christ. It wasn't a magic wand miracle, it was slow hard work, but it happened because I was praying for the Spirit's “rod (guidance) and staff (protection)” to comfort me. It was resurrection in the form of recovery to bring me back to life. Surrounded by the love of God and love of my family, I was set free from the grave I had dug for myself. In 1983, at Fairview Presbyterian Church, I wrote poems that led to an Easter Cantata titled, “The Hour I First Believed.” Mike Peevy, our Choir Director, put my poems to music and we performed it several times in the community. It was an intentional effort on my part to communicate that there are beliefs of religion (what I had affirmed from childhood – which I was taught) and there are beliefs of our spiritual connection with God (which was revealed to me, as I struggled to come back to life from the survivor's guilt that was drowning me. In the newsletter, “For Crying Out Loud,” (attached) I wrote, “Actually, I believe God wants our prayers to be for a special relationship, our covenantal connection. A poetic analogy could be that God wants our prayers to be ‘the glue that cements us together.’ The relationship we then create day by day only becomes stronger with heartfelt prayers.” Believe me, being cemented to God through my prayers to Jesus Christ, enabled me to write another poem that took me six months to write, “Southern Crescent Run.” It was a metaphor and an analogy hidden underneath a real-life event. The United States Government had decided to shut down “The Southern Crescent” Train that had served the DC to New Orleans corridor, like “The Orange Blossom Special” had served Florida or like “The City of New Orleans” had served the mid-west. It was also a metaphor and an analogy for the recovery race I ran, because of my Grandmother Busby's death, which was almost the last straw to break the camel's back of my survivor's guilt. The middle chorus said, “Southern Crescent run, the saddest race you've ever won. Southern Crescent run, the hardest pace you've ever done!” I didn't know at the time I wrote this that that I was finally beginning to win a race against my own self-destruction. On October 5, 1985, my thirty-eight birthday, my older son Glen Albert Busby, Junior was killed suddenly in a bicycle accident – “one moment my loved one was alive, the next moment my loved one was dead.” There is no doubt in my mind that the recovery given me as a free gift by the Spirit was also the

saving grace that surrounds me during the darkest days of my life – like with Lazarus, Jesus was there at the right moment in time to walk me out of my self-made tomb. That's my resurrection story and that is Lazarus's resurrection story. However, I don't believe Lazarus's resurrection is the most important part of John's biblical pericope (a set of verses that forms one coherent unit or thought, suitable for public reading from a text, now usually of sacred scripture). Verse 35: "Jesus wept" is well known as the shortest verse in Scriptures. When the story is retold, it is not what is most commonly emphasized. However, Verse 35 is about Jesus' deep feelings for those he loved.

### Jesus Wept

As said before, this story is about the resurrection of Lazarus by Jesus – a miracle where no one could call Jesus a magician with a sleight of hand. When you have been buried four days, you will be dead, even if you weren't dead when you were buried. There is also affirmation of the authority Jesus had as the Messiah even before Lazarus is risen from the dead. Mary assures Jesus that she believes he is the Messiah. But the real story is about the greatest miracle and gift our triune God gives us in our living and breathing existence – the greatest gift is the ability to love one another, and when we do miracles, thrive all around us.

<sup>32</sup> Mary arrived where Jesus was, and as soon as she saw him, she fell at his feet.

'Lord,' she said, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died!'

<sup>33</sup> Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. <sup>34</sup> 'Where have you buried him?'

he asked them. 'Come and see, Lord,' they answered. <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> 'See how much he loved him!' the people said."

These five verses are about the family grieving together. Crying comes with pain, loss, and desperation, but it also comes with joy and celebration. Lazarus's family which clearly included Jesus and the disciples (note: they did not want him going back to Bethany alone) were together sharing their feelings and emotions – for no one should walk through the valley alone. Jesus wasn't the only one crying, but for others, like the Gospel writer John, Jesus's weeping was a sign of their master's humanity. Hope springs eternal, what a friend we have in Jesus, because like Lazarus, we are promised resurrection.

### Benediction:

How do we find Heaven on Earth –  
When we allow misery to trump joy?  
When we allow suffering to trump blessings?  
When we are lost in a maze  
of our own creation,  
as we crawl through death's valley?  
Life becomes livable again,  
When we pray for resurrection  
from our empty tomb,  
a tomb we have crafted for ourselves.  
The sooner we restore our souls,  
The sooner we can celebrate life.  
Grasp for pathways with your hands  
to guide you through life's labyrinth.  
When daylight reappears in the valley,  
We will discover Eden's Garden refreshed,  
as it becomes our new Heaven on Earth.  
So, the infamous quote from my friend  
Eddie R. comes to mind, when he said,  
"Boss man, this is Heaven on Earth!"

Social distancing is the cry of the day but be careful that it doesn't evolve into social isolation. Remember, as part of Christ's family we are called to share Good News by reaching out to each other. Loving relationship can hurt during times of crisis or tragedy, but loving relationships are what gives us heaven on earth. Don't let Corona Virus take your heaven on earth away from you. Amen