

SIN & HOPE

IT SEEMS QUITE APPROPRIATE ON THIS ALL SAINTS' DAY TO LOOK AT THIS GOSPEL STORY OF JESUS RAISING LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD. THIS STORY IS ONLY FOUND IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, NO OTHER GOSPEL. MARK WRITES OF NO SUCH EVENTS. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WILL SAY THE BIBLE CONTRADICTS ITSELF. NOT SO, BECAUSE EACH WRITER, INSPIRED BY GOD, WROTE TO A DIFFERENT AUDIENCE AND WROTE THOSE EVENTS THAT WOULD, TO THAT GROUP, HELP TO DEMONSTRATE WHO JESUS WAS.

THERE IS A QUESTION POSED BY THE PEOPLE IN THE STORY WONDERING WHY JESUS DID NOT COME SOONER. HOWEVER, JEWISH BELIEFS AT THE TIME THOUGHT THE SPIRIT OF SOMEONE HOVERED OVER THE BODY AROUND THEIR TOMB FOR FOUR DAYS SEEKING ENTRANCE BACK INTO THEIR BODY. BUT AFTER FOUR DAYS THE SPIRIT FINALLY LEFT, BECAUSE BY THAT TIME THE BODY HAD DECAYED AND WAS NO LONGER RECOGNIZED.

IF JESUS WOULD HAVE COME ANY SOONER WE CAN ASSUME THE PEOPLE WITH THEIR BELIEFS, WOULD NOT HAVE LOOKED UPON IT AS A MIRACLE BUT THAT THE BODY WHICH HAD BEEN HOVERING AROUND THE TOMB HAD FOUND ENTRANCE AND GONE BACK INTO THE BODY. HOWEVER, BY JESUS WAITING FOUR DAYS, ALL THE PEOPLE KNEW LAZARUS WAS DEAD. STRANGE THINKING TO US, BUT THAT WAS THE BELIEF BACK THEN.

THE OTHER REASON FOR THE DELAY IS STATED BY JESUS HIMSELF *"DIDN'T I TELL YOU THAT IF YOU BELIEVE YOU WILL SEE GOD'S GLORY?"* JESUS POINTED TO GOD, THE FATHER FOR WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN, NOT HIMSELF!! WHAT AN EXAMPLE FOR US AS HIS DISCIPLES!!! NONE OF WHAT WE DO IS TO BE FOR OUR "GLORY", BUT POINT TO GOD.

OKAY NOW, HERE IS THE RECORD OF AN EVENT THAT SHOWS THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH JESUS, HIS SON, BY RAISING THE DEAD. **GREAT, BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME TODAY, IN MY LIFE?**

IF WE STUDY THE BIBLE, NOT JUST READ IT, WE CAN LEARN MORE OF WHAT GOD DESIRES OF US IN OUR DAILY LIVES. WHEN WE GATHER HERE ON SUNDAY MORNING, MY PRAYER IS THAT EACH AND EVERYONE OF US WILL TAKE SOMETHING FROM THIS HOUR WE SPEND TOGETHER. IF YOU ATTEND A BIBLE STUDY, SMALL GROUP OR SEMINAR IT IS GOOD BECAUSE NEITHER YOU NOR I HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS. IF SOMEONE TELLS YOU THEY DO, RUN IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, BECAUSE THEY ARE OFF BASE. **AND BECAUSE WE DON'T KNOW IT ALL, WE SHOULD BE LIFE-TIME LEARNERS, GOD'S CHURCH IS MEANT TO MEET TOGETHER, LEARN TOGETHER, AND HELP EACH OTHER, EVEN WITH THE PRACTICAL THINGS OF LIFE. WE CAN'T BECOME SO HEAVENLY THAT WE ARE NO EARTHLY GOOD.**

SINCE BEING HERE I HAVE LEARNED SOME REALLY GOOD GARDENING ADVICE!!! AND I SURE MANY OF THE YOUTH AROUND THE CHURCH COULD SOLVE YOUR COMPUTER OR PHONE PROBLEM IF YOU JUST ASK THEM.

NOW LET'S LOOK AT LAZARUS FROM A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT VIEW. HERE HE IS LAYING **LIFELESS, BOUND UP, AND IN THE DARKNESS – ALONE**. “NOT A PRETTY PICTURE” AS PEOPLE LIKE TO SAY. **BUT CONSIDER THIS – HOW MANY OF US ARE OR HAVE BEEN AT SOME TIME IN THE DARK, BOUND UP, FEELING ALONE, EVEN LIFELESS?** AND IF YOU HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED SUCH A TIME, THERE COULD BE SUCH A TIME IN YOUR FUTURE! AFTER ALL WE ARE TOLD IN JAMES 1:12 **“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial”**. THERE IS NO PROMISE WE WILL NOT HAVE TRIALS, SETBACKS, OR WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL THEM, BUT GOD WILL DELIVER US TO THE OTHER SIDE, BEING WITH US NO MATTER WHAT WE ARE GOING THROUGH!!!

THERE ARE THOSE TIMES WHEN EVEN THOUGH WE MAY BE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WE FEEL ALONE, LIKE NO ONE IS THERE, LET ALONE LISTENING. IT IS WHY THERE IS THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS – THE BODY OF CHRIST!!! **I CHALLENGE ALL OF US TO REACH OUT TO THOSE AROUND US. ONE WAY - NO ONE SHOULD ON A SUNDAY MORNING BEING SITTING BY THEMSELVES IN FELLOWSHIP. IF YOU SEE SOMEONE BY THEMSELVES GET UP, GO OVER AND INVITE THEM TO YOUR TABLE. YOU CAN ALWAYS MANAGE TO FIND A PLACE AT YOUR TABLE, GOD FINDS ONE FOR YOU AT HIS TABLE ON COMMUNION. IT IS EASY TO SIT WITH THE SAME PEOPLE EVERY WEEK AND IGNORE, YES I SAID IGNORE OTHERS. IF WE CAN NOT MAKE PEOPLE SENSE WHEN COMING TO OUR CHURCH THAT THEY HAVE COME “HOME”, THEN WHY ARE WE HERE? WHAT ARE WE DOING IT ALL FOR? OUT OF HABIT? WHAT IS YOUR REASON? THEN WE ARE JUST LIKE LAZARUS BOUND UP AND IN THE DARKNESS!!! AND IF WE ARE NOT REACHING OUT, THEN OUR DOORS WILL CLOSE MUCH QUICKER THAN WE CAN IMAGINE! IT IS TIME TO REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY AROUND US, AFTER ALL IT'S IN THE MISSION STATEMENT “A CARING FAMILY OF DISCIPLES WHO KNOW CHRIST AND MAKE CHRIST KNOWN IN OUR COMMUNITY” THAT STATEMENT CAN NOT BE JUST WORDS TO US THAT SOUND NICE, WE MUST PUT WORDS INTO ACTION!!! BY EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US.**

CAN YOU EVEN IMAGINE IF EACH FAMILY UNIT BROUGHT JUST ONE PERSON TO CHURCH, TO AN EVENT? THAT COULD BE NEAR FIFTY PEOPLE OR MORE. MORE VOICES PRAISING GOD, IN FELLOWSHIP, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS AND WITH OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH CALLED CENTENNIAL.

NOW LAZARUS WAS WRAPPED IN FRESHLY CLEAN LINEN. BUT IT LEFT HIM ALSO BOUND UP AS WAS THE TRADITION. THIS BINDING CONSISTED OF BANDAGE-LIKE WRAPPINGS AROUND THE HANDS AND FEET. **THE HEAD BEING WRAPPED SEPARATELY. WHAT HAS THAT TO DO WITH ME YOU ASK? WHAT ARE WE WRAPPED IN? WHAT “RESTRICTS” US FROM MOVING FREELY? ARE PAST EVENTS HOLDING US BACK FROM BEING FREE IN THE LORD?** FROM A RELEASE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES TO EMPOWER US TO DO WORK FOR THE LORD WE NEVER THOUGHT WE COULD? THE BIBLE IS FULL OF STORIES OF PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND ME THAT DID EXACTLY THAT!! THE ONLY PERSON HOLDING YOU

BACK IS YOU!!! DO WE BELIEVE IN THE PASSAGE FROM PHILIPPIANS 4:13 ***“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”***. **JUST WORDS OR DO WE REALLY BELIEVE THE IDEA BEHIND THOSE WORDS?** LIKE LAZARUS ALL WRAPPED UP AND BOUND, WE CAN BE WRAPPED UP AND BOUND IN OUR SIN. AND THERE IS NOT ONE OF US HERE WITHOUT SIN AS TOLD US IN ROMANS. HOWEVER, NO MATTER HOW LOOSE OR HOW TIGHT THE WRAP IS JESUS CAN FREE US. BY THE POWER OF THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION WE ARE NO LONGER BOUND UP OR BOUND TO SIN. WE ARE FREE TO LIVE A LIFE IN CHRIST.

LAZARUS IS MORE THAN JUST A SYMBOL. IT IS TRUE THAT IN OUR LIVES JESUS CALLS US TOO OUT OF DARKNESS, FREES US FROM THAT THAT WOULD BIND US AND SPIRITUALLY BRINGS NEW LIFE TO US BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHERE BEFORE WE WERE LIFELESS. ONE MORE THING WE ARE NEVER, NEVER ALONE AGAIN. BY HIS PROMISE JESUS IS WITH US, THROUGH IT ALL -TEMPTATIONS, SORROWS, JOYS ANYTHING!!!

THE LAST CONNECTION WE HAVE WITH LAZARUS IS JESUS CALLED HIM OUT FROM WHERE HE WAS. FROM THE LAZARUS STORY WE SEE WHEN JESUS CALLS US HE BRINGS US FORTH OUT OF DARKNESS, LONELINESS, BONDAGE TO SIN, AND GIVES US A NEW LIFE OUT OF ONE THAT WAS SPIRITUALLY DEAD OR LIFELESS.

DID YOU NOTICE THAT IN VERSES 38 AND 44 JESUS ASKS THE PEOPLE AROUND THE TOMB TO REMOVE THE STONE AND LAZARUS' GRAVE CLOTHES. I AM SURE JESUS COULD HAVE DONE THIS WITH A WAVE OF THE HAND OR A FEW WORDS, BUT HE GOT PEOPLE INVOLVED. JESUS SEEKS OUR HELP – YOU, ALL OF US. LAZARUS WAS NOT MENTIONED AGAIN IN THE BIBLE HE DID GO OUT ON MISSIONS, SOME AS FAR WEST AS CURRENT DAY FRANCE WITH MARY MAGDALENE AND OTHERS.

AS WE REMEMBER THIS ALL SAINTS' DAY ALL THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US – FAMILY AS WELL AS FRIENDS, WE CAN PONDER THE **THREE R'S THAT SURROUND DEATH**. WE SHOULD **REMEMBER**, NEVER FORGETTING IN OUR HEARTS THOSE WHO HAVE LABORED AND NOW REST FROM THOSE LABORS, **SECONDLY** WE SHOULD **REVIEW** OUR LIVES - WHERE WE ARE GOING? WHAT ARE WE DOING AND WHY? **LASTLY**, WE SHOULD **REFOCUS**, CHANGE DIRECTION IF WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND REALLY MATTERS HAVE SOMEHOW BEEN MISPLACED. LIFE IS UNPREDICTABLE AND LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO BE DOING THOSE THINGS THAT WILL NOT MATTER IN THE END.

One day an expert in time management was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered over-achievers, he said, “Okay, time for a quiz.” Then he pulled out a two-gallon, wide-mouthed pickle jar and set it on the table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, “Is this jar full?” Everyone in the class answered, “Yes.” Then he said, “Really?”

He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the space between the big rocks. Then he asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was on to him. "Probably not," one of them answered. Good!" he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand into the jar and it went into all of the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question. "Is this jar full?" "NO!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good." Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim.

Then he looked at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?" One eager student raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!" "No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point.

The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all." What are the "big rocks" in your life? Remember to put these BIG ROCKS, the people and things that are really important to you in first or they may never have room in your life. Who or what are the "big rocks" in my life? Then put those in your jar first.

THEN WE WILL BE FREE OF THE DARKNESS, FREE FROM THAT WHICH BINDS US, FREE OF LONELINESS, FREE TO LIVE LIFE WITH HOPE! AMEN.