

Sunday, May 04, 2025

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Festal Evensong

4:00 pm

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae

on

John 11:17–44

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So that they may believe

In today's second reading which comes from the Gospel of John, we are brought to Bethany, to the tomb of Lazarus, four days after his death. We meet Mary and Martha—grieving, disappointed, and perhaps even a little angry. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” They had faith, yes—but also questions. Questions that we, too, have surely asked: *Why didn't God act when we called? Why didn't God come sooner?* And yet, it is precisely in this painful moment—this gap between expectation and reality—that Jesus speaks one of the most powerful truths in all of Scripture: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”

Why did Jesus delay? Why let Lazarus die, and his sisters grieve? Jesus lifts his prayer to God saying: “I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” Jesus didn't delay out of neglect or indifference. He allowed this painful event so that those present—and all who hear this story—then and now—are invited to believe. He was willing to risk not only his own safety, but the heartbreak of his dearest friends, so that the truth of who he was could be revealed.

Faith is precious—so precious that the path to it often comes through tears and struggle. Sometimes it is given gently, as when we are raised in the faith and grow into it gradually. Others come to faith through winding paths—through crises, doubt, or the witness of someone else's steadfast love. However we come to faith, we must remember: faith is never cheap. Today, we live in a time and place where it is remarkably easy to be a Christian. We face no persecution. We can drive to church—or attend from our living rooms. We don't even need to carry a physical Bible anymore; we can simply open an app on our smartphones and read it anywhere, anytime. What a gift! But as with all great conveniences, there is a danger: we may forget how precious faith truly is.

I think of the story of the Anglican Church in Korea, which began when a British bishop stepped foot on the small island of Ganghwa. Back then, there were few churches, little infrastructure, and few resources. Yet believers walked through the night—sometimes from villages miles away—just to attend the Sunday Mass. They prepared simple meals to carry with them, left their homes in the darkness of early morning or even the night before, and offered their Sabbath to God as a sacred act. Why? Because going to church

was not just a routine—it was a deeply cherished and meaningful practice, one they were willing to make real sacrifices for.

Today, we might press a few buttons and “go to church” in our pajamas. This is not bad in itself—technology is a blessing. But we must ask ourselves honestly: have we traded reverence for convenience? Have we become too casual about a faith that cost our ancestors dearly? Jesus risked everything to reveal who he was—not only in his words but in his life and in the lives of those around him. Lazarus was raised, yes—but he would also become a target. The chief priests plotted to kill both Jesus and Lazarus because of the growing number of believers. Martha, Mary, Lazarus—these beloved friends of Jesus—became participants in his mission through their suffering. What about us? Are we willing to let our lives become part of that same story of witness and sacrifice? Are we ready to carry the light of faith, even when it costs us something?

Friends, we know that there is no life without suffering. But not all suffering leads to life. The suffering that comes from faith, the sacrifices made for the sake of love and witness—these are never in vain. The disciples risked their lives, the early Christians gave their strength and time, and countless others—many whose names we do not know—shed tears and blood to pass on this faith. The faith we hold today is the fruit of those sacrifices. And now, the question is not simply *how did we come to faith?* but *how will we live it?* Will we take it for granted, or will we hold it with holy reverence? Will we pass it on—not just through our words, but through how we live, how we love, and how we suffer?

Each generation writes a chapter in the great history of faith. Ours is being written now. It will be read by the children and grandchildren of this church—by those who one day will ask, *What did they give? What did they love? What did they believe was worth suffering for?* So let us honor the gift we’ve been given. Let us remember how it came to us. Let us treasure our faith—not just as an idea, but as a life, a calling, and a mission. Let us, like Mary and Martha and Lazarus, like our ancestors in faith, become living witnesses—so that others, through us, may believe.
