

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday After Trinity, May 29, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 343:1-5, 268:5, 411, 373, 611:7

Lessons: 1 Kings 17:8-24, Acts 14:19-22, John 16:17-33.

Sermon Text: John 11:1-11

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ:

Martin Luther, the great reformer of the church, had his own personal seal, a seal which was a confession of his strong faith. The seal has a black cross in a red heart on a white rose, surrounded by a Golden ring. The black cross stands for all the tribulation which comes from sin. The red heart stands for the blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin. The white rose stands for the perfect righteousness of Christ and the purity of souls of believers who have been redeemed by Christ. The Golden ring signifies eternity which believers will spend with Christ the Savior. Luther knew that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven.

If people were given the choice, they would most likely want their life to be a bed of roses, free from sorrow and tribulation. But the Bible tells us believers in Christ: ***“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”*** Acts 14:12 (NKJV) We should remember also that our Lord knows what it is best for us with regard to our eternal salvation. Our text will help us understand this better as we meditate on:

TRIBULATION FOR THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST.

- 1. We cannot escape tribulation;**
- 2. God has a purpose in sending it;**
- 3. Finally we shall be delivered from it.**

“Now a man named Lazarus was sick, he was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick’”. From these words we learn that there was sorrow in the home of Mary and Martha. Their brother, Lazarus, was sick. They were experiencing what every believer in Christ can expect, namely, tribulations. The two sisters and their brother lived in Bethany, a little village about 2 miles from Jerusalem. They were close friends of Jesus, and Jesus and his disciples enjoyed the hospitality of their home many times. This is that Mary of whom we read: ***“then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair.”*** John 12:3 In this way she showed her love for the Savior in whom she put her trust. This is the same Mary, the Bible says, ***“who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.”*** Luke 10:39 This too was a fruit of her faith in Jesus to humbly sit at Jesus’ feet hearing his word.

As true believers in Christ, Mary and Martha prayed to the Lord for help in their tribulation. They didn’t put their confidence in man’s help. They didn’t pray to some dead Saints who can’t hear or answer any prayer for help. They had the faith of the Christian poet who wrote:

“What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!” (The Lutheran Hymnal 457:1)

They made use of their precious privilege as believers in Christ and sent a messenger to Jesus with a prayer for help.

Our text gives us several fine examples which we do well to consider. The first is that we cannot escape tribulations which come as a result of sin in this world. Though we are God's dear children by faith in Jesus, we are not immune from the ailments common to mankind in this world. We daily experience all kinds of tribulations. We should remember also that God sends these things to us because he loves us. The Lord says: ***"those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."*** Revelation 3:19. Another fine example for us is that the two sisters prayed for their brother. Christians should plead for one another before the throne of grace, especially in the day of trouble. We note also this fine example of prayer by the sisters: ***"Lord, the one you love is sick."*** When we pray, we should not boast of our love for the Lord, but acknowledge his great love for us. The love of Jesus is worth more than the love of any friends or relatives. It is worth more than any skill of a physician or medicine he may prescribe.

Because we cannot escape the tribulation, we should expect it and accept it without complaining. For we learn from our text that **God has a purpose in sending it.**

2.

When Jesus had received the message from Mary and Martha, he 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."*** We note that Jesus did not say that Lazarus would not die. His sickness would not end in death, for Jesus would raise him up from the dead. Later in this chapter we read that Jesus said: ***"Lazarus, come out! The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face."*** John 11:43-44

In this way the sickness of Lazarus would be for the glory of God and his son Jesus. When Jesus is glorified, the Father also is glorified. Jesus prayed in his prayer before he died: ***"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."*** John 17:4-5. The glory of God is shown in that he is perfectly holy, in that he is righteous, merciful, and gracious, and in that he is ***"the way, and the truth, and the life,"*** John 14:6. The glory of God is manifested in all his attributes. This glory Jesus manifested in his life on this earth, so that John could write of him: ***"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the father, full of grace and truth."*** John 1:14. When Lazarus died and Jesus raised him from the dead again, Jesus glory as ***"the resurrection and the life"*** John 11:25 was revealed before the eyes of men. All that God does for our soul's salvation through his word and sacraments is for the glory of God.

It is also to the glory of God and serves his purpose when he sends tribulations to his believing followers, for in this way he tests and strengthens their faith. When tribulations test our faith and strengthen our reliance on Christ, this is to God's glory. When tribulations make us hold fast more firmly to God's love, when they make us to be more patient and trustful in God's wisdom and power, and when these tribulations cause us to become more certain that we will enjoy eternal life, all this glorifies our Savior and our heavenly Father. We all know that sickness, sorrow, and all the afflictions of this life are not pleasant to endure. However, when we remember from God's word ***"that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose,"*** Romans 8:28 then we are greatly comforted. Then we can also say with Paul: ***"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*** Romans 8:18.

It is even more comforting to know that **finally we will be delivered from all tribulation.**

3.

"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days." Jesus loved his friends at Bethany with a love that our minds cannot fully comprehend because it is so great. So he also loves all true believers. This love is strong and mighty especially in time of trouble. Lazarus lay dying, and during just this time of tribulation Jesus especially showed his love for his Bethany friends. The sun of Christ's love also shines brightly when the shadow of tribulation comes into our homes.

It was Jesus' great love for his friends at Bethany that prompted him to wait two days before going to the village. It may have appeared that Jesus had not heard the sisters' prayer for help. But Jesus deliberately

waited two days until Lazarus had died before he came to Bethany. During this delay when Lazarus died the faith of the two sisters was severely tested. The promise of Jesus' help seemed worthless. So it is also in our lives. It may sometimes seem to us that the promises of God fail to come true and then we are disappointed. But the fact is that God's promises are always fulfilled in a way that he knows to be best for us. It requires a simple, childlike faith in such times of tribulation to believe the promises that God makes to us in his holy word. When the promises are at last fulfilled, our joy will be all the greater. Therefore, we should always pray: ***"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*** Mark 9:24. And we should listen to Jesus when he says: ***"Everything is possible for him who believes."*** Mark 9:23.

After two days of delay, Jesus ***"said to his disciples, 'let us go back to Judea.' 'But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?'"*** Jesus had gone away from Judea and the country around Jerusalem because the Jews were seeking to kill him. He had gone to the east side of the Jordan River to quietly do his work. Now as he planned to return to Bethany his disciples were afraid that their Master would be killed by the Jewish unbelievers. ***"Jesus answered, 'Are there not 12 hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by his world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.'"*** Jesus spoke to his disciples in a kind of figurative language. In these words he assured his disciples that there was a period of time, which he compares to 12 hours of daylight, in which he would do the work his heavenly Father had sent him to do on this earth. This was the most important work of redemption. No one would hinder him or prevent him from doing this work. Jesus was determined to proceed with this work also at this time when he had received a message to help his friends at Bethany. Jesus' words remind us of another similar statement Jesus made when he healed the man born blind: ***"as long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no man can work."*** John 9:4. These words remind us that God gives us a certain period of time to live on this earth. During this time we should diligently work to help spread the gospel of salvation in Christ. When the night of death comes to us, then we can lie down in peace and rest from our labors.

"After he had said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I'm going there to wake him up." Now Jesus determined that the time had come to comfort his friends at Bethany. The friend of sinners gathered his disciples about him and in the most loving way told them that Lazarus had fallen asleep and that he would wake him up. What heavenly and comforting language Jesus used to speak of death and resurrection! Since ages past Christian people have spoken of death as a sleep. The Christian poets have written of it also. When a loved one dies who believed in Jesus, we like to think of death as a sleep from which Christ will awaken our loved one on the Last Day. Jesus spoke of death as a sleep because for the believer in Christ death is like a sleep until the resurrection from the grave on the last day.

And may we also be comforted when we think of our own death as being asleep in Jesus. We who believe that we have been delivered from sin and everlasting death in hell by Jesus' suffering and death and the shedding of his precious blood, should comfort ourselves with these confident words:

Asleep in Jesus! Oh, for me
May such a blissful refuge be!
Securely shall my ashes lie
And wait the summons from on high." (The Lutheran Hymnal 587:4)

No matter how old or young we may be, we should remember that as believers in Christ we are, as Peter says, ***"aliens and strangers in the world."*** 1 Peter 2:11. Heaven is our true home and our Savior ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us so that we can be with him in eternity. So we need never be afraid to die when our time has come. Rather we can look forward to it as a peaceful sleep until the Lord raises us up and takes us to heaven. That will be the end of all tribulation and affliction, troubles and tears.

Let us, then, remember what we have learned from our text: We as believers in Christ have to expect tribulations in this sinful world. We also can be assured that whatever tribulations the Lord gives us will endure only for a time. He has a blessed purpose in giving them to us. Finally we shall be delivered from all tribulation and sorrow and be with our Savior in heaven. What a blessed comfort this is! Amen.