**John 11:33-37** 4 March 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mid-week Lent #2

*John 11:33When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked.*

*“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.*

*35Jesus wept. 36Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

In 1961, out of fear of what could happen, President Kennedy created what would become the Federal Air Marshal Service. In the decades after 1961 not much happened in the air. So, this law enforcement service wasted away. By September of 2001 there were only 50 officers. Then 9/11 happened. Suddenly there were air marshals everywhere. But here was the catch: you never knew who they were. They traveled *incognito*. They were not to be known or noticed, only to be a silent, kinetic force, ready to come into play at the moment of need.

As our family boarded a flight only weeks after 9/11, I wondered if we would have an air marshal on our flight, “Who are they? What do they would look like?” It didn’t take long and I was pretty sure we had an air marshal. Here’s how it happened: Our flight was a tiny commuter jet, three seats wide; two on one side, one on the other. Back then airlines still gave you pretzels or peanuts in flight. At the start of our flight, out came the stewardess to hand out the snacks—only she wasn’t a stewardess, he was a steward—or at least he was dressed like a steward. All six-foot-four, 250 pounds of our linebacker built steward squeezed down the tiny aisle of that claustrophobic plane, literally tossing our bagged snacks at us. Now maybe he was an American Airlines steward taking remedial hospitality courses—and maybe not!

These days, air marshals are a bit better at blending into the crowd. But that’s okay. It is comforting to think that maybe, very likely, there is a hidden warrior in our midst on any given flight—and, that the bad guys don’t know who he is!

Hidden warriors—their hiddenness is crucial. Their strength is surprise. For our Hidden Warrior this evening, Jesus, his hiddenness is a little different. It isn’t surprise that is his strength. In fact, he would that everyone knew who he is! Yet part of what gives us confidence in him is his apparent weakness. Tonight, we watch ***The Son of God Go Forth to Battle*** as

***The Hidden Warrior***

Our reading doesn’t bring out so much the “warrior” part as the “hidden” part.

Jesus arrived at a funeral as one of many mourners. The deceased was a man named Lazarus, whom Jesus had called friend. The bereaved were Lazarus’ sisters Mary and Martha. In a time more people centered, people stopped for funerals. Visitations took place not for a couple hours on a Thursday evening, but for days on end. People visited the home of Mary and Martha and they stayed. They brought their condolences and food and gifts and sat with the sisters in the ashen shadow of death. People did not try to sweep the reality of death under the carpet with a “celebration of life.” Even while remembering Lazarus’ eternal life, they mourned the parting of ways, the person who would no longer enrich their earthly pilgrimage.

It was not strange that Jesus missed the burial. He had been many miles away. In a day before refrigeration, burials took place quickly. Without fast transportation, people got places only as fast as their legs would take them. Jesus arrived after the body had been placed in a tomb and the opening closed. (By the way, that Lazarus was placed in a tomb indicated that this was a family of means. Commoners were buried in graves.)

But even on this fourth day from Lazarus’ death, there were still many at the sisters’ home. Jesus became one of them, a mourner. He looked Mary and Martha in the eye, and he shared their loss. He told them that Lazarus would rise from the dead, and he felt the loneliness they felt. When Mary broke into tears, ***“he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled”*** (33).

Nowhere else in the Gospels can we so fully view how far the Word, the second person of the Trinity has stooped for us. He took on frail flesh, and all its frailties.

We don’t know fully what it means, but the holy writers tell us of toddler Jesus, *“And the child grew and became strong”* (Lk 2:40). About the boy Jesus about to become teen-ager, it says, *“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”* (Lk 2:52).

He grew. And he hungered and thirsted. He felt tired and rested. He slept. But does he really feel the depths of what we feel? A billionaire begging on the street corner wanting to experience what it feels like to be homeless—he always knows he can drop the rags and he cardboard sign at a moment’s notice. He can try, but does he *really* know what it means to be homeless? Can the Son of God really understand the frustration and futility of being human?

Here, with one or two other passages in Scriptures, but perhaps here more than any, Jesus shows that he has truly assumed our weaknesses. He stands before death… he stands with all humanity, and he weeps.

Consider that! Remember Jesus out in the desert tempted by Satan. Remember that Gospel this past Sunday! Remember Jesus, unflappable before the tempting assaults of Satan. Every time, without hesitation, he rebuked Satan from the Word of God, finally telling him, *“Away from me, Satan!”*  And Satan left him (Mt 4:11-12). But here before the tomb, Jesus is almost overwhelmed.

For this moment, he is a “hidden” warrior. For this moment, it seems that this Messiah, in the end, faces the same final limitations as us.

In your moments of frustration and sorrow, remember Jesus’ tears! When you look at yourself in the mirror and see someone bested by what God has handed you in life, remember Jesus’ tears! When the past haunts you, and worse than haunts you, terrorizes you, remember Jesus’ tears. When what you face in halls at school is daily torture, remember Jesus’ tears. Yes, Jesus is your Savior from sin. Never say that lightly. Never say that like it’s nice on paper but doesn’t do much for today. But Jesus’ tears tell us that he also knows, understands, cares.

As Jesus wept, the bystanders noted, ***“See how he loved [Lazarus]!”*** How sweet to hear those words! No, I wish no sorrow in my dear Lord’s heart. But how sweet to hear of his not only heavenly, but also earthly friendship with this Lazarus. Indeed, even while it makes Jesus Christ look like less than the ideal warrior, how I treasure these tears. It is his sympathy for humanity, for us. How glad I am that Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb! It assures me that his road to the cross was not a billionaire flippantly tossing hundred dollar bill at bystanders, laughing as they squabble like chickens.

Some knew there was more to Jesus than met the eyes: ***“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*** (37).

They knew what they had seen so far from Jesus. They knew the power of God worked in him. But their knowledge was not yet faith. Finish the sentence for those bystanders, “He could have… but he didn’t… and now he can’t.” That’s what they thought. Now it is too late. The grave does not give up its dead.

In a few short moments Jesus would prove all their expectations wrong. In the rest of John 11, after our reading, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus let a glint of his divine power shine. People with ears to hear and eyes to see would learn that as the Son of God goes to battle, he is a Hidden Warrior.

Looking back, *only* looking back, years down the line, did Jesus’ disciples understand it all. Jesus was so well hidden that even those who ate, drank and stayed with Jesus didn’t really know this Hidden Warrior in their midst. Only after the fact did they realize. You can hear it especially in the New Testament epistles of Peter and John. Sure, the Apostle Paul knew it, as did others. But these two, Peter and John, had lived it and could never get over it. Their letters often read like, “I can’t believe that we actually sat at a table with the Son of God every day. I can’t believe that we listened to God speak.” Maybe they would have added, “And what really put us off the scent was that moment at Lazarus’ tomb. We saw those tears, and we thought they were weakness. But they weren’t. They were signs that God understands.”

Thank God for our Hidden Warrior. Amen.