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Scripture

John 11:28–44

²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So 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?” ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I 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.” ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Devotional

Walking through the dark days of Lent can be difficult even for the most pious among us because we forget, for much of the time on most days, that we are in Lent. Furthermore, Easter, the light at the end of the tunnel, can rob Lent of its human reality by injecting a subtle dose of Docetism, the doctrine that Christ was only divine, not really human, and therefore did not really suffer.

Oddly, wonderfully, it is John’s very divine portrait of Jesus that shows us his true humanity: Jesus was very upset about Lazarus’ death; he wept . . . while assuring Martha of resurrection hope (vv. 23–27).

On this eve of Passion Sunday and Passion Week, which brings us to the crucifixion-death of Jesus, we remember that much of life is like Lent. On this side of the empty tomb, there is suffering—which is what “passion” means—and lots of it. Even if shy of Job’s devastation, our lives are punctuated by pain and prayers of desperation. And as Ecclesiastes reminds us, echoing Genesis 3:19, we will all die.

The amazing mystery of Jesus’ humanity reminds us of our very own humanity that is all too tempted to leap to Easter joy. But we cannot afford to be docetic, especially during Lent, especially during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday. By meditating on Jesus’ sorrow at Lazarus’ death, we can properly contemplate the divine mystery of Jesus’ own suffering and death. And only through meditating on his passion can we glimpse the profound mystery of Easter joy . . . of which we shall not yet speak.

Prayer

O God of mystery, root us in your immeasurable love as we continue our walk through Lent that we may truly embrace Jesus' humanity and thereby also ours. Keep us faithful and hopeful in the love and humanity of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.