

WITH JESUS, IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

John 11:32-44; Delmer Malo Funeral; September 6, 2023

The death of a loved one sometimes brings regrets to those left behind. “If only I had known he was going to die, I would have....” and you could insert any number of things that you might have tried to do in the time you had left: visit one last time and say your goodbyes; tell him again that you loved him; be reconciled over some past hurt that has separated you for years. We can miss some deadlines and get away with it, but someone’s death is a deadline without second chances. If you left anything left undone with Delmer, Monday, August 28, came and went, and it’s too late now.

If God sets deadlines and we miss them, will it be too late for us? One deadline all have is the day we will face God’s judgment. God sets a deadline for faith in Him which expires when our bodies expire and die. If we do not have Christian faith when we die, we won’t get a second chance; we will face God’s judgment at that point. From this side of the grave, God’s judgment of an individual who has died might be uncertain to us, but it will be made public on the Last Day when all the living and dead will be brought before the judgment seat of God in their flesh to hear His verdict.

This is what we are warned of in Isaiah 55.

**Seek the LORD while He may be found;
call upon Him while He is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. (55:6-7)**

If we are living apart from God now, we are warned to repent of our sinful ways and return to the Lord in faith. God has promised pardon for our sins out of His love and compassion for us. God wants no one to be lost in sin but come to the knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ, for whose sake our sins are forgiven. As long as we live, God gives us time to repent and believe in Him, but we need to seek Him while He may be found – now – because a time will come when it will be too late, and the deadline will have passed.

Did Delmer miss the deadline a week ago Monday? All we have today are the remains of his body which has died, yet I am confident that Delmer sought the Lord when He could be found. Living in his baptismal grace, Delmer confessed his sins from his nursing home bed eleven days before his death and received the forgiveness of his sins in the absolution and the body and blood of Jesus, which he was able to eat and to drink. Delmer's body was weak and already on the road to the grave, but his faith found its strength and life in Jesus Christ who was with him in Word and the Sacrament. Delmer's death did not cause him to miss this deadline because Jesus was with him.

The Gospel Reading from John 11, the account of the death and raising of Lazarus by Jesus, illustrates that, "With Jesus, It's Never Too Late." The Reading picks up in the middle of the account with Jesus arriving four days after the death of Lazarus, and Mary, the sister of Lazarus, repeating something her sister, Martha, had already said to Jesus after He arrived. **"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died"** (11:21, 32). In other words, they were both saying to Jesus, "You got here too late!"

John had made the interesting observation that Jesus, after hearing the word that His friend, Lazarus, was seriously ill and needed His help, waited two days to come. But, even if Jesus had left immediately to the town of Bethany, Lazarus would have been dead already when He arrived since we are told he had been dead four days and buried probably for three days. Yes, Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying if He had been there earlier, but that was not God's plan.

When Jesus wept for His friend at his graveside, those who saw it questioned if it were an empty gesture. **"Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"** The implication in their comment is that Jesus had failed to do in a timely way what was needed. His claims to be God's Son and true God with the Father (10:30-33) were attacked as blasphemy and worthy of being stoned to death they thought. That Jesus had failed to keep Lazarus from dying was proof to them that He was not who He claimed to be.

Where was Jesus when Delmer died? Jesus' promise to all His disciples is, **"I am with you always"** (Mt 28:20). What difference does that promise make since we are going to lay Delmer's remains to rest in the grave? The account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead gives us hope.

When Jesus suggested that they roll back the stone covering the grave of Lazarus, **"Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.'"** Again, Martha was telling Jesus that "it was too late" for Him to do anything.

That Lazarus was buried in a cave with a stone rolled across the entrance was the typical way of burial those days. After a body had decomposed, the bones were gathered and put into a smaller box and the space was available again to lay a new dead body. Gathering his bones later was the next contact with the dead body of Lazarus his family expected to have.

"Jesus said to [Martha], 'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone... [Then Jesus] cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

All of us who are familiar with the Easter account are given hints by these words of what Jesus was up to. Jesus revealed the **glory of God** by raising Lazarus from the dead, a sign of things to come. Jesus would die on the cross, be buried in a tomb with stone rolled to seal Him in, and then rise on the third day. Jesus would shed the linen strips that bound His dead body in the tomb and be clothed with the glory of God that will never be taken from Him.

This is why, with Jesus in our lives, it is never too late. Because Jesus, risen from the dead, was always with Delmer throughout his life in His Word and Sacrament of the forgiveness of sins, the Day will come and Jesus will cry out with a loud voice, **Delmer, come out**, and he will rise from the dead. In faith, we look forward to that Day. Lord, be with us and keep us in the true faith until that Day! Amen.