

Victory of the Lamb – April 2, 2017 – Bill Limmer

Like Us In Every Way – The End Is Not The End – John 11:17-27, 43-44, 49-50

How many of you have lost of loved one? How many of you have lost a loved one in the last year? There was a woman, I will call her Lucinda, because that was her name. When I first met her she was a rail thin, tough as nails, fun loving, hardworking, farmer's wife and mother in her low 40's. She was a real spark plug to every event she was at. And then cancer got her. Months of treatment, months of prayers, months of great concern. Home visits and home communion. It just did not look good at all. She didn't eat much, if at all. She was dwindling away. No strength, no energy, no hair, no smiles. It looked like THE END. This was a terrible time, for her, her family, her church family. And then over the course of a couple of weeks things changed. Her appetite came back, her spring came back. Her energy came back. Her hair came back. Her smile came back. The doctor declared she was cancer free. Oh the jubilation, of the celebration, the happiness, the relief! We, because it wasn't just her that had cancer, her church family had it with her, felt great! Back to normal. Then several months later she felt something was off. She went back to the doctor. The cancer had come back. It came back with a vengeance, relentless, aggressive. She became very ill. She was hospitalized, I was sick and couldn't visit her because you know that someone who has cancer absolutely doesn't need someone who is sick spreading the germs. So I called a neighboring pastor to visit her. After a couple of days the neighboring pastor called me and said, come on up and visit her. She needs you. She isn't going to make it. The End is near. The 20+ mile drive to the hospital was dark and not just because it was late at night. I shared time and scripture with her and her family. And the next morning was The End.

Her family was devastated. Her church family including her pastor were devastated. We thought we had won but we hadn't. It was horrible. I remember doing the prayer service the evening before at the funeral home. Place was packed. Church members, family friends. I began in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit only it was more like in the name of and my voice gave way to a lump in my throat, the flood gates of my eyes opened up. It took me about, no lie, two minutes to say in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The following afternoon we had the funeral. It was The End. We were all covered in grief. Because of sin there is the sting of death.

For those us who have had a close friend like Lucinda pass away, or someone even closer, a spouse, a mom, a dad, brother or sister, son or daughter we know about the sting of death. I can't tell you how many times I have heard after the death of a loved one, "Pastor, I know I shouldn't cry." Who said that? I mean you don't have to cry but it is certainly ok to cry and I say that not just because I cried but also because Jesus cried too. Today we are going to see that Jesus is like us in every way even when it comes to grieving, when it looks like it is The End.

Prior to our lesson today, there were siblings, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And they will very close with Jesus. Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus to let him know that Lazarus was sick. No doubt they wanted Jesus to know about this and be able to see Lazarus before he died and hopefully do something to keep Lazarus from dying. If you have been at the death bed a loved one, you know how Mary and Martha felt. You are hoping this isn't The End that Jesus doesn't let your loved one die. **John 11:17-27 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.** ¹⁸ **Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,** ¹⁹ **and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.** Just like today right. A loved one dies and we come from all over to offer support and love. We come together and we say things like, it is good to see you. We should do

this more often and at a happier occasion. ²⁰ **When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.** ²¹ **“Lord,”** Martha said to Jesus, **“if you had been here, my brother would not have died.** ²² **But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”** Martha goes to Jesus. She comes with a mix of blame and trust. ²³ **Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”** ²⁴ **Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”** ²⁵ **Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;** ²⁶ **and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”** ²⁷ **“Yes, Lord,”** she replied, **“I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”** In her time of grief, sorrow, sadness she ran to Jesus in faith.

After feeling the comfort of the presence of her dear friend, Jesus, in the death of her brother, Martha now went back to get Mary to come and see Jesus. She wanted Mary to get the same comfort, the same hope that she received. John 11:28-33 **The Teacher is here,”** she said, **“and is asking for you.”** ²⁹ **When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.** ³⁰ **Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.** ³¹ **When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.** ³² **When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”** When Mary reached Jesus, she fell at his feet, this is worship, this despondency, this is grief. There is a great depth of emotion here. As we read it they are only white words on a dark screen, but there was a severe rawness here. Deep pain and anguish. Mary now says the same thing, if you had been here my brother would not have died. When someone we love dies, there is a tendency to blame God. Lord, since you are all powerful you could have made it so that my loved one didn't die. Physical death affects those still living. The death of Lucinda affected her husband, her son, her community. The death of Lazarus affected, Martha, Mary and his community. Death of a loved one affects with sorrow and loss. And as much as we would like the pain to go away, sometimes it doesn't. ³³ **When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. . . He wept.”** Notice Jesus doesn't scold the sisters of their words. He showed compassion and understanding for those who grieve. When Jesus saw this he was deeply moved. He is shaken, it disturbs him. He unashamedly and without embarrassment wept. What happened when your love one died? You may or may not have blamed God. You may or may not have cried. Jesus cried. It was never supposed to be this way. As natural as death is, it is completely unnatural. It was never supposed to happen. God didn't create us to die but to live. Death seems like The End but it is not the End.

Jesus said, (John 11:25-26) **“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;** ²⁶ **and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.** And then just a few verses later John 11:43-44 **Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”** ⁴⁴ **The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”** Friends, The end is not The End. (Don't live like you have this life and then it is the End.) One of the commentaries I read long ago shared words that stuck with me. Do you know why he said Lazarus come out? Instead of just “come out.” Because if he would have just said, “come out,” everybody who had ever died would have come out of the grave. Jesus performed this miracle to give you and me confidence that he is greater than death.

Death would become a reality for Jesus too. Talk about something unnatural. The author life gives up his life. The one who breathed life into the human spirit would breathe his last on the cross. His going back to grieve for his dear friend would result in his arrest and crucifixion. **Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all!** ⁵⁰ **You do not realize that**

it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” Christ death was a real necessity. God’s anger over sin had to be appeased and instead of taking it out on us, He gave up his one of kind Son to be our substitute. All our wrongs of thoughts, words and actions, could only be forgiven by a pure sacrifice, the death of Jesus. Isaiah 53:5 **But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.** It looked like The End but it wasn’t. Three days later Jesus conquered death. And in just two weeks we are going to celebrate God filling empty lives with hope. I want to encourage you to come, bring your family, your friends, so that they can see the End is not the End.

One day when I was driving to our campus ministry center in Madison. I was on highway 51 and entering Hwy 51 from a side street there was a funeral procession, the funeral procession of a teenage girl. And as car after car drove by, with the orange magnetic funeral flag on car after car, I thought about the extreme grief that the mourners were feeling. I knew the young girl was a Christian who had died. And as tears were welling up in my eyes, I remember the truth the end of life is not the end of life. One day there will be this amazing family and friend reunion in heaven. Because one day Jesus will not say “Lazarus come out,” he will simply say “come out.” The End is not the End. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. And because of Jesus, I want you to know the BEST is yet to come.