Ash Wednesday John 11:33-37
Feb. 26, 2020 98-98, vv. 4-6-103/100-593

May Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us and grant us His peace. Amen.

Jesus – the Hidden Warrior

I. Jesus wept like one of us.

II. Jesus has great unimaginable power.

III. As both God and man, Jesus fights for us.

Dear Christian friends,

They've been called the men of the "GREATEST GENERATION" – the men – and women! – who fought the battles of WW II. That's not meant to downplay the BATTLES and SACRIFICES of the veterans of other wars but to acknowledge the SCOPE and MAGNITUDE of WW II.

Where did those men and women of the **greatest generation** COME from? From the families and **farms** – the cities and **towns** – across our country. They were ORDINARY, AVERAGE men and women who did and endured the EXTRAORDINARY of WW II.

Our theme for this **Lenten season** is "THE SON OF GOD GOES FORTH TO WAR" – to fight a war that would change the whole world. AS Jesus went forth to war He looked like an **average, ordinary** guy JUST LIKE the men of the **greatest generation**. We could say Jesus **went forth** a HIDDEN WARRIOR. Looking at these verses we see that Jesus 1)wept like **one of us**, 2)has great **unimaginable power** and 3)as both God and man **He fights** for us.

I. He wept like one of us.

Jesus went forth LIKE ONE of us. **Like us** Jesus got tired, **hungry**, **thirsty**. Jesus had grown up JUST LIKE **any other** child – He ***"grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people."***

But there is ONE BIG DIFFERENCE between Jesus and us – Jesus had no sinful nature – Jesus was completely sinless – He NEVER sinned – **not even once**! God the Father could honestly say about Jesus' life, ***"with Him I am well pleased."*** We're told that Jesus ***"has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."***

Each one of us owed God SUCH PERFECT **love** and **obedience**. **Each one** of us deserved God's rejection and hell's **eternal punishment** because of our sinful defiance and rebellion. Jesus lived **His perfect life** FOR us and IN our place. **When** Jesus then sacrificed His perfect life on the cross it really was the PERFECT SACRIFICE that ***"takes away the sin of the world."*** NOBODY ELSE could ever live or do what Jesus HAS ALL DONE for us. But you couldn't see that JUST BY LOOKING at Jesus.

We catch some glimpses of Jesus' **greatness** and **power** at times. We have one **such glimpse** here. Jesus had stopped by the home of **His friends** Mary and Martha. **Their brother** Lazarus had died and been buried **four days** earlier. ***"When Jesus saw (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and troubled. He asked, 'Where have you laid him?' They told Him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"***

What a LOVING, CARING HEART Jesus has! That's why He was crying. **Mary, Martha, Lazarus** were His friends. He had SPENT TIME with them – visited their home – eaten and **no doubt laughed** with them. Now HE TOO was crying with them. It was a NORMAL, HUMAN REACTION. We too know the **pain** and **sorrow** death brings – the tears and **heartache** death causes.

II. Our Warrior has great, unimaginable power.

Two days before Lazarus had died Jesus had received a message from Mary and Martha. ***"Lord, the one You love is sick."*** But Jesus didn't show up UNTIL **four days after** Lazarus had died. Some of Mary and Martha's other friends who HAD ALSO COME to ***"comfort them"*** were struggling with a NAGGING, DISTURBING question. ***"Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"***

Jesus had recently healed a man ***"blind from birth."*** That miracle had happened in NEARBY Jerusalem. Those **other friends** of Mary and Martha were now wondering why Jesus HADN'T COME EARLIER and used some of His **healing power** to HELP HIS FRIEND Lazarus and spare Mary and Martha **such heartache**. Martha herself had told Jesus, ***"Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died."***

We too know **Jesus has power** – ALMIGHTY power. At the start of his gospel John had written that ***"through (Jesus) all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."*** The writer to the **Hebrew Christians** tells us that Jesus ***"sustains all things by His powerful word."*** Look what creation tells us about **both** God's WISDOM **and** POWER. Just by saying, ***"Let there be…"*** God made the world and all that is in it and He got it right the **first time**! CONSIDER THE MARVELS of the countless stars and **galaxies** – the mind-boggling varieties of **plants** and **animals** – the complexities of our **human bodies**. SUCH IS the power and wisdom of our God!

Paul wrote the Philippian Christians that ***"Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."***

That "SON OF MAN **who goes forth** to war" is the eternal Son of God INCARNATE – IN THE FLESH. **Our** eternal Creator was born our **flesh-and-blood** brother. Or as Luther explained it in the catechism, Jesus is "true God, **begotten** of the Father from eternity and also true man, **born** of the virgin Mary."

But Jesus didn't parade around BRAGGING, "**I'm God** and you're not!" Jesus ***"humbled Himself – made Himself nothing – took the very nature of a servant."*** Jesus ***"didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*** We could say Jesus HID His **divine power** and **glory**. Jesus HAD – but He didn't always use – His **divine, almighty power**.

Jesus always had His **divine power** and this is ONE OCCASION where **He used** it. Jesus had told Martha that she ***"would see the glory of God."*** You know how this ends. ***"Jesus shouted with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The man who had died came out with his feet and his hands bound with strips of linen and his face wrapped with a cloth."***

WE can't do anything about death but look what Jesus does to death! When Jesus commands DEAD PEOPLE to **get up** and **come out** the dead OBEY – they **get up** and **come out**! **Death** must give way to ***"the Lord of life."*** Jesus delivered the DEATH BLOW to **death itself** on Easter morning when three days after He Himself had died He physically rose from the dead – He came out of His grave ALIVE and TRIUMPHANT. Jesus will totally destroy death on **the Last Day** when He raises all the dead back to life and takes us Christians GLORIFIED body and soul to live forever with Him in that ***"new heaven and new earth, where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain."***

With SUCH HIDDEN POWER "the Son of God **Goes Forth to War**." Our Lenten journey follows Jesus into His GREATEST BATTLE of all **on Calvary's cross**. Jesus had lived for us the **holy, sinless** life WE OWED God. Now we see Jesus ***"obedient unto death, even death on a cross."*** Betrayed and **denied** – mocked and **beaten** – condemned and **crucified** – Jesus goes forth our HIDDEN WARRIOR. He carries on His **sinless shoulders** the sins of the whole world. He endures the **death** and **hell** we HAD COMING. He's forsaken but **in the end** He cries out IN TRIUMPH, ***"It is finished!"*** – all sins of all people FULLY PAID for and completely forgiven – the devil ***"crushed"*** IN DEFEAT. We're forgiven – WASHED CLEAN in the **shed blood** of God's ***"beloved"*** Son. We anticipate the

VICTORY of **Easter morning** – the victory of the **Last Day**. Victory WON – victory GUARANTEED and given to us by Jesus.

III. As both God and man, He fights for us.

Jesus had called Lazarus his ***"friend."*** His ***"friend"*** Lazarus was DEAR and IMPORTANT to Him. Jesus calls us His friends. He's made us His friends **in the washing** of Holy Baptism. Like Jesus our REAL IDENTITY is often HIDDEN. **Hidden** as we struggle with **temptations** and our **sinful natures** – HIDDEN as we deal with life's **pains** and **problems** – HIDDEN as we wrestle with doubts and questions. AT TIMES it can so look and feel AS IF God doesn't love us – **as if** God has abandoned us – **as if** God is nowhere to be found. But then we look again at Jesus – His cross – His empty grave. THERE is the answer to our **doubts** and **fears**. THERE is our strength to **keep going** and **fighting**. IN JESUS God loves us – forgives us – calls us His children – promises us **eternal life** and **peace** in heaven.

That Jesus CONTINUES TO FIGHT for us. He's promised to ***"be with us always"*** – to ***"never leave us nor forsake us."*** He's promised to ***"work all things"*** for our eternal good – that ***"the gates of hell will not prevail"*** against us – that ***"no one can snatch us out of His hands."*** He's promised that ***"we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us"*** SO MUCH. FOR NOW Jesus remains hidden from our sight. ONE DAY SOON our faith ***"will turn to sight"*** – and what a sight it will be – the victory celebration ***"before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb."*** Amen.