

Homily delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
The Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 29, 2020

(John 11:1-45)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our creator, our sustainer and our redeemer. Amen.

[E]ven now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.

In this time of separation, I have no doubt there is a very real struggle for many in trying to find the reality of that statement in their lives.

[E]ven now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.

We know without question of course, as Martha asserted in this passage from John, that Jesus **could** ask God for **anything** and receive it. It is a beautiful, powerful statement rooted in her faith ... a sign of the strong foundation holding her up even as the things around her were falling apart.

Her beloved brother, Lazarus, was dead. Jesus, the dear friend for whom the family had sent and whose arrival was anxiously awaited, hadn't been there. There had been no miraculous healing. There was no display of incredible power. There was no sign of the wondrous things that had been done for others. Lazarus was sick ... and then he was dead ... and now he was buried. Despite the time that had passed ... for four long days ... Jesus hadn't arrived.

It was **an** end.

*In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth...¹*

But it was not **the** end.

Even in those dark, grief-filled moments, faith was present. In fact, I think it was faith that **drove** Martha. In the depths of her sorrow, she didn't wait for Jesus to come to her. She went to find him, and to tell him there would have been no end had he been there to prevent the final page from being written in her brother's story. But she didn't stop there, for her faith continued to push through the pain. Martha knew in her core that through Jesus anything was possible. *[E]ven now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.*

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets, Part II: East Coker*. <http://philoctetes.org/documents/Eliot%20Poems.pdf>

Somewhere deep inside, she knew the story wasn't at an end. Burrowed deep in her soul, she knew it could not be – it ***was not*** – over.

In my end is my beginning.

What about for us, even in these difficult times? Can we say of ourselves that “even now I know that God will give ***me*** whatever ***I*** ask of him?” In short, with faith we know the answer is “yes”. In our own time of separation we can reflect on the separation in this scene: by death, Lazarus was separated from his family and friends and buried in a tomb. But with three words ... *Lazarus, come out!* ... everything changed. The separation was ended; the celebration began.

It's important to note that this was not accomplished just by Jesus. It took a community ... messengers to relay news, and people to remove the stone from the tomb, and friends to free Lazarus from his bonds after walked out of the bonds of darkness into the liberating light. God ***did*** grant Jesus what he asked; it wasn't in the time that Martha and Mary ***wanted***, but it was in the time that was ***appointed***.

The same is true for us. ***Our separation will end***. We too will walk out of the tomb of distancing in which we find ourselves. Through faith and prayer, God ***will*** give us what we ask of him. We ***will*** live again as a community ... not as one linked through technology and that sees one another through a screen, but one linked arm in arm and seeing each other face to face. But until that time ... until we are fully freed ... we have an opportunity in the here and now to do what those who helped Jesus did, and to do it ***for one another***.

We can be messengers sharing words with a loved one or neighbor ... words of peace, and support, and love, and encouragement. We can help move the stones blocking something in the life of a friend ... stones of fear, or loneliness, or isolation. When we encounter someone for whom the stress and uncertainty of this time has them bound up tightly, we can help loosen the bonds with reassurance and hope.

[E]ven now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him. God will give ***us*** whatever we ask. The seeming end in which we find ourselves will have a new beginning ... and we will rise again and begin life anew.

Amen.