

Jesus – if you had been here (Eternity Sun)
John 11:1-7, 14, 20-26, 40-44

“Lord Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” If only you had been here. What took you so long? Where were you when I needed you, God? Is this what Mary and Martha wanted to say after their beloved brother Lazarus had died?

Death is a harsh jarring reality. We have tried to shut it out of our lives; we tuck the sick, the elderly, and the dying away into care facilities. Our cemeteries seldom are not around our churches anymore. We arrange them to be distant to the living. We use words like “passing, instead of died.” We have tried to sanitize our lives by keeping anything that reeks of death out of them.

The medical field is so advanced today that many illnesses that resulted in certain and premature deaths in earlier centuries can be cured or at least slowed down in our day and age. Expectations of life have gone up so dramatically that often doctors, who do their best, see death as a defeat, and not as something that we all have to face sooner or later.

We hate to talk about medically assisted dying and we whisper about medically assisted lengthening of life. We turn away from death and are hungry for life, which we try to enhance, fix, keep, and prolong as much as we can. It is hard to accept the reality of our mortality. But my doctor told me, “Old age is mandatory.”

And so we may feel abandoned, abandoned by God, when someone we love dies. **Lord, Jesus, if you had only been here, my brother, my mother, my child, my friend would not have died.** Where were you? What kind of God are you to let this happen?

“Lord Jesus, if you had been here, my loved one would not have died.” I know you have the power over death, Lord, I believe in you. Your presence is all that is needed for life. Is this what Mary & Martha wanted to say after Lazarus has died? Well, especially Martha seems to expect some sign from Jesus, even in this reality of death. She slyly says, “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Come on, Jesus, I know you can do it!

How often in the face of death do we try to bargain with God? We have faith, we know that our redeemer lives, we believe in the power of prayer, we believe in life, and we are certain that God doesn't want death. God, we know you have the power: save our loved ones and ourselves from suffering and death. Come on, I know you can do it!

We don't dismiss the power of prayer, God forbid. We have prayed for brothers and sisters in and beyond our congregation. We have seen little miracles in our own midst: people living much longer after being diagnosed with a deadly disease than expected. Faithful prayer does something.

But then, there is a fine, or maybe not so fine line between faith & false confidence that we surely must receive God's favors. Rose, my wife was engaged. But before they married, he died. His family thought that if you believed correctly & enough, their son would not die. That wasn't Rose's experience as she felt Jesus' presence in this difficult situation. But she was blamed for Tim's death, because she did not have enough faith. **Jesus, if only you had been there.** Or was he there?

Death remains a reality, and what happens if God doesn't grant us what we ask for? What if someone we pray for still dies? What happens to our faith in those times? Do we

dismiss God because we don't get what we think we deserve, because God isn't keeping God's part of the bargain? We wonder why some families experience so much tragedy. We experience sorrow at someone's pain. And we question God's fairness.

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died?” O, Jesus, tell me he would not have died if you had been here. You would have averted death, wouldn't you? Please affirm my hope, affirm my faith, give me some comfort here. Is this what Martha and Mary wanted to say after Lazarus has died?

Whenever we lose someone, we may be looking for answers, and unfortunately there are many who are quick to give them – with comments that may cause more heartbreak and questioning God's love. Well, it was their time to go, we might hear. Or there's now a new flower in God's garden. Or we may hear, he or she did not die in vain, but that there was a purpose behind their dying. Some may think that, as long as someone dies for something, be it their country, or freedom, or their faith, death makes sense.

But the reality is that there are no quick or easy answers. Not from Jesus. Or from God. Not from the Bible. Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus. Jesus knows that death and violence is still at large and rampant in this world. From religious terror, to ethnic cleansing, hatred, to acts of personal greed, to just pure plain evil – the news depresses us. Many deaths make no sense whatsoever.

Death is the enemy of life, the enemy of God. And Jesus knew that he faced his own death, a painful, agonizing death. A theme in this story goes, “But Rabbi, Jesus,” the disciples asked, “a short while ago the Jews in Judea tried to stone you, and yet you are

going back there?” When Jesus insisted on going to Bethany, “Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’” This story is filled with death.

Jesus did not prevent Lazarus from dying. Jesus didn't even prevent his own death; but he points at a reality that lies beyond death, He asks us, as he did Mary and Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

For those who believe, God is present, and where God is present, death will not have the last word. And that's why we have hope. God is with us. This is the ultimate promise. This is a reason John was so insistent about Jesus' incarnation. And we know the cross was not the end. There is an empty tomb.

So we are invited, even challenged to believe in the words of Isaiah. “Fear not: for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you: when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; neither will the flame consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.” (43:1b-3a)

We are invited in life's difficult situations to say, **“Lord Jesus, where are you?”** And we are invited to proclaim with Martha, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

Almighty Creator God also invites us to trust that Jesus sends to us & on us the Holy Spirit The supreme great Comforter, Counselor, Guide, Intercessor, Teacher, Spirit of Truth and of Grace. So we believe Jesus' promise

that he sent the Holy Spirit to be with us, is real, when we ask, “Where are you?”

Faith is believing Joshua’s proclamation, “Be strong & of good courage; Be not frightened, neither be dismayed; For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (1:9)

And we can find courage in Jesus’ words, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

May we find precious memories, support, and reassurance as we remember those who have died this last year. We also may recall friends and family who died in previous years. And we may remember the deaths of strangers who died in some tragedy.

When we participate in this basic ritual we open ourselves to memories, to the past and to the present, and to feelings that surround us in the today when we remember someone that we have loved and who loved us. Those feelings include grief, but probably feelings of warmth and joy and a special closeness with the people we are remembering that may be difficult to put into words. We may have to deal with some difficult memory. Or find ourselves smiling with a reminiscence.

And most of all, we can answer the question, “**Lord Jesus, where are you?**” because we have and are experiencing your presence among your worshippers. Your existence in us and with us, lifts us up. Come Lord Jesus, we need you now as we remember.

We come together to say, “Yes, we grieve”, but we do not grieve as those who have no hope (I Thessalonians 4:13). We believe that Jesus conquered the power of death, and that we will see Jesus and our loved ones again after our bodies die.

Ceremony - Remembering those who died.

Dan lead

Hymn / song

Communion is an act of answering the question, “**Where are you Jesus?**” Because this isn’t just an ancient traditional ritual. It’s a proclamation that Jesus is here in the bread and wine. The Lord’s Supper is an act of remembrance. It’s an assertion that Jesus is the Son of God. It’s a celebration that Jesus is alive and with us, right now. This act is an edict that sin and death is defeated. It’s a declaration warning the world that the love of God reigns, and will reign forever.

Where are you God? You are here among us. We live in your Creation. You are especially present for those who worship you, and follow your Son. May we please you by announcing to the world, we trust your wondrous grace, mercy and guidance.

Lord’s Supper Preparation 781 MWB

Worship Leader lead

And Jesus announced, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

With this teaching, some disciples deserted Jesus. So Jesus asked the twelve core disciples, “Do you also wish to go away?”

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Prayer of Preparation - 788 HWB
Worship leader lead

Time of silent reflection and prayer

Holy Scripture invites us to trust in these promises that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is with us.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Is. 41:10

Jesus promised: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Mt 28:20
(Worship leader lead)

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Romans 8:28-29

“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” Zephaniah 3:17
(Worship leader lead)

Jesus tells us: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be

with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” John 14:16-17

Lord’s Supper 785 MWB – first part - Dan
Serve bread

Lord’s Supper 785 MWB – second part
Serve cup

Lord’s Supper Response 790 MWB Unison
(Worship leader lead)

Closing hymn

Benediction

Put together something that includes something like: Where are you Jesus?

Response from pew ?– something like – I’m right here in the bread, the cup and my congregation at North Star. And I’m in your hearts.