

The Fifth Sunday in Lent, Cycle A  
Ezekiel 37: 12-14  
Psalm 130: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8  
Romans 8: 8-11  
John 11: 1-45  
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Our Lord loves each of us with an extravagant, unbounded, profligate love. Each of us tries to love Christ in return, to the full extent of our human capacity to do so.

Mary and Martha lived their lives in just this way. Our Gospel tells us that Jesus loved them, and they certainly returned his love. After all, tradition suggests that this is the Mary who anointed the Lord's feet with perfume, and dried them with her hair. What better example could we have of someone responding to the unconstrained bountifulness of Christ's love for her, with an extravagance of her own? -- of a loving human attempt to return like for like. So the experience of Mary and Martha can help us, as we try to emulate their response to Christ's love.

Their grief at their brother's death is a reminder, that loving Jesus doesn't exempt us from suffering and loss. They'd sent a message to Jesus, asking him to come and heal Lazarus. But instead of rushing to the aid of those who loved him, Jesus deliberately waited two days before setting out for Bethany. When Martha and Mary each say to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would never have died," we hear a note of reproach in their words. They are saying in effect, "We know you loved him, and us. You could have saved him. We don't understand why you didn't drop everything and hurry to his side."

Yet, despite their grief and confusion, their love for Jesus, and their

faith in him, endures. And their love must have deepened, when they saw how he shared their pain. Troubled in spirit, our Lord wept, and the mourners said to one another, “See how much he loved him.”

Finally, Jesus says to Martha, “Did I not assure you that if you believed you would see the glory of God.” And he calls Lazarus forth from the tomb, and restores him to his sisters. Mary and Martha had come to know Jesus well. They knew he was the Messiah. But it would never even have occurred to them that Jesus would raise their brother from the dead. It was beyond imagining.

What is true of Mary and Martha’s relationship with Jesus, is true of our own. Faith doesn’t preserve us from suffering. In fact suffering is a stipulation of discipleship. Christ tells us, “Take up your cross and follow me.”

And as was the case with Martha and Mary, in our grief and confusion, we might feel that Jesus has failed us when we needed him most -- that he hasn’t performed the miracle that would be so easy for him, and would mean so much to us. If we feel that way, we should turn to the Lord, as Mary and Martha did, and tell him so. But we can take solace in the knowledge that Christ shares our grief. Our Savior weeps with us. He would die for each of us. In fact, he’s already done so.

Our ways are not God’s ways. We can’t predict miracles, or make God conform to our expectations. But we do ask God for what we want, because Jesus told us to. God gives one of two answers our prayers. One answer is “yes.” The other is “Wait, I have something even better in mind for you -- something more wonderful than you can imagine.” And if, in the face of our grief, frustration and confusion, we, like Mary and Martha, remain faithful, we will one day see the glory of God. But for

now, we can only love . . . and trust the Lord who loves us.