

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, April 25, 2024

Today is Thursday, April 25 and we are studying the Gospel of John.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, be present with me as a new day dawns. Help me remember to seek you first in life before all things. As I enter this time of prayer and reflection, I calm my mind, quiet my thoughts and slow my breath. I gently inhale your love, joy and peace as firmly as I exhale any negative thoughts, cares or concerns. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 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." John 11:38-44

REFLECTION

Jesus was close friends with a brother and two sisters who lived in Bethany, a village just a few miles east of Jerusalem. He often stayed at their home when he came to the city for the great feasts. The man's name was Lazarus and his sisters were Mary and Martha. One day, Lazarus became very sick and his sisters sent for Jesus to come. Jesus waited several days before he gathered his disciples and traveled to Bethany. By the time they arrived, Lazarus was dead and buried. He had been in the tomb for four days. Martha met him outside and greeted him in the depths of her grief, she went to the house and got her sister Mary. Mary fell at Jesus' feet in tears wishing he had arrived sooner. It was too late. Their beloved brother was gone. Jesus saw the enormity of their grief and was deeply moved. He wept in sadness and then headed to the tomb to perform a miracle. Men removed the large stone from the entrance of the tomb and Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave.

The Messiah raises what is dead to life. Death could not hold Jesus and it did not hold Lazarus either. He will raise me to life one day as well. These earthly bodies are temporary dwelling places for the eternal soul. This is not my permanent home, I am just passing through. These human bodies are subject to disease, injury, age, atrophy, and death. Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection promises salvation and life and a taking on of an everlasting heavenly body of existence for everyone who believes in him. Jesus' raising of Lazarus was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah and a foreshadowing of his own death and resurrection which would occur only eight days later.

As Jesus wept for the loss of Lazarus and the grief of his sisters, he weeps over the loss of every soul. He weeps for souls that are dead in sin, lost in suffering and cut off from God. He came to offer salvation to everyone, everyone who will believe. He cries for my soul. He calls me out of the grave, wakes me up from death, calls me out of the darkness of the tomb and into the light of God's love. He removes the grave clothes that have held me down for too long. The stench of rotting flesh is replaced with the beautiful fragrance of righteousness and the blessed aroma of holiness. He calls me up out of the tombs I create for myself - tombs of doubt, sin, worry, fear, grief, depression and isolation. He calls me to new life in him.

Ask: Where do I need to hear the voice of Christ calling me to life? What are the stones that need to be removed and the grave clothes that hold me down?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus Christ, you are the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in you will live, even though they die. Whoever believes in you will never die. I believe this to be true. Call me out of the graves of my existence, take away the stones that separate me from you, open my ears to hear the sound of your voice calling my name, remove the grave clothes that hold me back and the sin that binds me. Set me free to live the life you have for me. Amen.