

John 11:33-37 *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴“Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

What does a warrior look like? If you are from my generation, you might have pictures of Sylvester Stallone and Rambo come to your mind. We might describe a warrior this way: tough, face of steel, focused eyes that look right through you, muscles bulging, fearless, able to endure and overcome tremendous odds, all the gear. Typically anyone who would be described as a warrior you could look at and right away say: That’s a warrior!

We’re following the theme in our Lenten services: The Son of God Goes Forth to War. Last week we talked about how the whole war centered around a promised warrior. This warrior, Jesus, went forward on our behalf to fight a war that would change the whole world. Yet he didn’t look anything like we might expect a warrior to look. He walked among the people just like anyone else and to most, didn’t look anything like a warrior—especially the type of warrior they were expecting. But looks can be deceiving. He not only fought the war against death and the devil but is always with us as we continue to do battle in our lives. You might say that Jesus is a Hidden Warrior.

Our text shares with us two traits of Jesus that you might not readily associate with a warrior. We aren’t surprised throughout the Gospels to hear that Jesus shared many of the same traits that we have. We know that he got tired, hungry and thirsty just like we do. Even warriors have these needs. But the one that might surprise is listed in our text: Jesus wept. We don’t expect warriors to cry. We expect them to be tough, battle hardened men who face death every day and just drive on. We imagine them to be detached from emotions and able to objectively look at the situation. We don’t expect them to cry. That makes us uncomfortable. It makes Jesus appear weak. Some might look at him and suggest that he isn’t even strong enough to control his emotions. How could he possibly be a warrior fighting on our behalf?

But let’s understand why Jesus was crying. His friend Lazarus had died. Jesus was close to Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. We can understand someone shedding tears at the grave of a loved one. Tears are the outflow of a grieving heart. I’ve heard it said: Tears are the price tag for love. Yet if we took a time to evaluate the tears that we shed at a funeral, aren’t most of those selfish tears? The tears are really more for ourselves than for the person who died. Our tears come from questions or statements like: How am I going to go on without that person? My life is going to be so empty without that person. I am going to miss that person terribly. How is this going to change my day to day life? These tears often come from a broken heart. They come from the unknown of death and the sense of loss we feel.

I’m by no means suggesting we are wrong to shed these tears when a loved one dies, but it makes our tears different from Jesus’ tears. We know that he could not have selfish tears. He was like you and me in every single way with one major exception—he was without sin. As God, he knew exactly what happened at death and what lay on the other side. So he wasn’t crying selfishly at the grave of Lazarus. His tears came from a caring heart for his people. His heart went out to Mary and Martha and Lazarus. His tears came because of what sin did to his people. God had not intended death from the beginning. God had intended his people to live on this earth forever. Death came into the world with sin. We face the heartache of death because we are all sinners. As long as we are talking about tears and death, we think about the tears we have to shed because of all the sins we have committed which cause us to face death. How many times have we hurt our children with thoughtless words? How much irritation and anger have we caused because we have selfishly spent too much time on Facebook, Youtube or internet gaming? How many tears have been shed because of hurtful words spoken between spouses? How many tears have been shed because we’ve allowed our love for our family to shrivel and starve? How many times have we avoided the chance to start a conversation about Jesus and left another soul untouched by our Savior’s love? How many regrets do each of us have because of our sins?

This leaves us nothing to brag about and everything to shed tears of repentance for. Yet our God did not throw us away or disown us because of our sin. He loved us enough to come into the world to rescue us from our sin. We see the caring heart of Jesus as he stood at the grave of his friend and wept for him. Those same tears wept for you and me also because of what sin has done to us. It was this love for all of his people that led Jesus to come down to this earth to do battle against the devil for us. Many may not look at the tears Jesus’ shed and come away with the thought that he was a warrior, but we look at those tears and we see how deeply Jesus was affected by our sin and how much he cared for us.

The second trait of Jesus that we might not readily associate with a warrior is displayed by the question some of them asked, *“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”* Do you see what they are implying here: Maybe he doesn’t have the power of a warrior we might have thought he had. He might be able to help a blind man see...but he didn’t have the power to keep this man from dying. They were implying—he isn’t the warrior we thought him to be. But Jesus had a purpose in this that none of these people could know at this time. The truth is he could have healed Lazarus and kept him from dying. Earlier, when Jesus had first heard that Lazarus was sick and on his deathbed, Jesus had said to his disciples: *“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that the Son of Man might be glorified through it.”* (John 11:4). Then we are told that Jesus waited a few more days before traveling to Bethany. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead and in the grave for 4 days. They were afraid of his body starting to stink. It was more than enough time for everyone to know for certain that Lazarus was truly dead. This made it

even more amazing when Jesus stood outside the grave and called to Lazarus: *Lazarus, I say to you, Come out...* and he did! This gave Jesus the opportunity to display his power over death. The people there were able to see the glory of God with their own eyes. Jesus showed them a glimpse of the power at his disposal. He smacked death in the face and forced it to yield to him. Like a warrior practicing his skills before a great conflict, Jesus is getting ready for his final battle with Satan just a week or so away.

This is how this event also served to glorify Jesus. This raising of Lazarus would trigger the events that would lead to Jesus' death. It was just before the Passover and the Chief Priests and Pharisees were growing evermore afraid of his popularity. It was the popularity he received from this event that led them to decide it was time to get rid of him once and for all. They gave the order that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report him so that they could arrest him. Just a short time later, Judas would do just that as he betrayed Jesus for a mere 30 coins. Here again we see a hidden warrior where others might see nothing. All of this was under Jesus' control and timetable. His time had now come and his love for you and me led him to set in motion the events which would eventually lead to his death on Calvary.

While it would seem that he lost the battle on Calvary, you and I know differently. The devil didn't win on Calvary because Jesus rose on Easter Sunday. The Father accepted the sacrifice Jesus offered on that cross and declared with finality that the war was over and Jesus had won! Sin is forgiven and those who believe in Jesus as their Savior will live forever with him.

So what does this mean for us? Sometimes it may seem as if God is far away from us as we fight through our daily battles. It almost feels as if he is hiding from us. You pray, but it doesn't seem as if he is listening. You read the Bible, but it doesn't seem to speak directly to you. Is he hiding? Does he care? Our text would tell us today to be careful judging things with what we can see with our own eyes. He cared for Lazarus and Mary and Martha. He cares for you and me. We see how the death of his friend moved him. He called you his friend and made you part of his family through Baptism. How do you think he feels about you, especially when you are at a weak spot in your life—kids picking on you at school, your co-workers constantly critical of your efforts, your spouse giving you the silent treatment or your friends abandoning you? Look at the cross and you find your answer: Jesus has your back. He not only cares but he has the power to help. We are fully aware of the fact that the devil and his evil angels are circling our lives looking to take us down. But we also know the power that Jesus has which has already defeated them. So picture this: With one hand, Jesus is controlling the universe and his other hand is wrapped around you. You can't see it yet, because our risen Jesus, who fills the entire world with his presence, has chosen to remain hidden from our vision right now. But he's there and he's always been there. We may not know his plan, but he has one and is working it in our lives. He's fighting for you every single day. Every pray that you have uttered as a believer has been picked up by him and personally delivered to your Father in heaven. He has assigned angels to protect us as the spiritual battles are waged for our souls.

The tears which Jesus shed at the grave of Lazarus show us how deeply he cares for us. The cross proves it and our risen Savior assures it. You're safe in the best and most powerful hand in the universe. He may remain hidden for now, but his power remains through all eternity. You are in a mighty warrior's hands! Amen