



St. Michael's Church
CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2018

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7
JOHN 11:1-11

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

Heavenly Father in this season of Lent:

- Quiet our busy minds
- Focus our affections
- Open us up that we would be fully yours under your Lordship.

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“One day you will hear that Billy Graham has died.

Don't believe it. On that day I will be more alive than I ever will be.”

-signed...

Billy Graham.

Reading this popular quotation about Billy's death hit me like a ton of bricks on Wednesday, reminding me again how different the Christian worldview is from a non-Christian Worldview. Christians really do believe we will live forever after this life; it's a game changer! From the families of the victims of the school tragedy in Florida to Mother Emanuel, I want to continuously shout from the housetops Billy's words: “Don't believe my death, I am more alive than I ever have been!” Today we continue our engaging the City Preaching series, in which we have gone from challenging, to restoring, to now comforting our city. But what does it mean to Engage the City by Comforting the city?

Comfort is a word that reminds us of snuggling up to a warm fireplace on a cold day. But in our reading from 2nd Corinthians, Paul uses the word comfort '9' times in 4 verses, and uses it to mean more than soothing-sympathy. I remember years ago when my children were really young. We were in New Orleans and my son Christian tripped over something in our hotel room. It was one of those spectacular falls. And for some reason I just started laughing, I did, I'm not proud of it. It was just so circus like. Christian looks up at me and says: “Dad you have no compassion.” To which his younger brother Hudson adds...”Yeah dad, you have no...” But Hudson stops because he forgets the big word used by his older brother. So Hudson starts again and says, “Yes Dad you have no...IMPASSION.”

Comfort means more than compassion. Comfort comes from the Latin word bravery. Comfort Biblically defined is something that **EMBOLDENS** others into courage! Which is why Paul uses the word 9 times!

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, The Father of all comfort..”

So, engaging our city through Comfort:

- How do we comfort?
- How do we embolden our city?

Let me take you to Bethany, the place of the most dramatic and provocative miracle in the Bible, the story of the pain of Mary and Martha dealing with their brother Lazarus.

Here's how it unfolds: Jesus is in Jerusalem, and from Bethany Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that their brother is sick. They are as emotional as you would expect. Yet Jesus doesn't run back to Bethany. In fact he waits in Jerusalem 2 more days, and then goes there. But when he finally decides to go, the Disciples say wait a minute, Bethany is where the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you're going back there?

It's clear that for Jesus, His desire to comfort another was stronger than his desire to avoid danger.

As the story unfolds, Jesus models '4' ways he comforts those in His life who are really suffering.

Quick time out, some of you this morning are suffering, really suffering, these words are words that Jesus has for you. For others, Jesus is giving you these words to take to the suffering Mary and Martha's in your life. Which is why Paul says in Corinthians...

- **"The Father of all comfort---has comforted us:**
- **So that we comfort others in any trouble**
- **With the comfort we have received from the Father.**

We have to export the comfort that we have imported!

To give us all a memory hook, the 4 ways that Jesus brings comfort all begin with a 'd'.

First..Jesus **Declares** the promise that this sickness Lazarus has will **not** end in death. Jesus comforts and emboldens first by **Declaring in no uncertain terms that Death is not the end!** It's actually a double declaration.._"Jesus says, this sickness will not end with death!" Yes, Lazarus will be healed, but eventually years later, Lazarus does die, but even then he would live forever! Death is not the end!

Jesus says to Mary and Martha later in Chapter 11, "I am Resurrection and life, He who believes in me even though they die, will live forever!" Jesus to comfort **DECLARES: DEATH IS NOT THE END!** Which means that every Christian tombstone should have a dash after the year of our physical death to remind the world, we live forever!

When a friend is grieving, do what Jesus did.

- Take that father who lost a child
- A Daughter who lost a mother
- and whisper in their ear...
 - *death is not the end*
 - *death is not the end..*

To you right now who are suffering, let me whisper to you, this death you feel is not the end! That pain, sadness whatever is on your heart that feels like death...it's not the end! New life is coming! Declare my friends, in the name of Jesus and the spirit of Billy Graham, death is not the end!

So Jesus, makes that declaration from Jerusalem and then walks the 2 miles to Bethany and there finds that Lazarus had died. Grief is everywhere. Chief among the mourners are Martha and Mary. Within minutes of each other, both Mary and Martha, without knowing what the other has said, say the same thing to Jesus..."Lord had you been here, my brother would not have died." We get the feeling that Martha is enraptured with pure grief, while Mary's emotion is a bit different, it's filled with that grief with an added angry resentment...

- To Martha Jesus again declares death is not the end... as a way of comfort..
- To Mary...the Bible says Jesus weeps with her.
- To both.. Jesus DOES NOT anger at their grief.

It's the second way He comforts. Jesus **Does** NOT anger at our suffering.

I say this because there are some of us that think

- "If I tell God how I really feel"
- "How angry I really am"
- "How resentful and embittered I really am"

Then He will smite me, and if he doesn't smite me He will certainly be angry with me.

Jesus DOES not anger in our pain! In fact, Jesus wants us to take to him every emotion we have, holding nothing back. It's okay to shake our fist at God and say Why? Some of us this morning need to be more honest with God and go deep with him and say Lord if you really existed then... *You fill in the blank. Be honest with him.* Have you ever given God the what for? Mary and Martha did and needed to! And so do we. God will not punish you for it. He simply wants to receive the real you - give it to Him.

If you have others who are in your arms yelling and blaming God, it's okay: Let them. As Jesus lets them..

I remember a time when I was in seminary doing my clinical work at MUSC. I was called in to the Emergency Room and had to tell a young bride that her husband drowned while surfing at Folly Beach. The only advice my advisor gave was to go in, give the news and do one thing, just hold on to her. Be an outlet for her terrified grief. Weep with her. There was nothing she couldn't say...

- Declaration-
- Does not Anger-

And maybe this is why the next form of comfort is so important. Delay is often God's way. To us waiting is wasting. To God waiting is working. Why did Jesus wait two days before he came to Mary and Martha? Why did he let so much time go by when He could have healed Lazarus from the start? The answer is found in verse 4...Jesus declares resurrection, and then says: "It is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified."

Quick disclaimer here, Jesus doesn't cause every hurt, but he will never waste a hurt. Jesus doesn't cause Lazarus to get sick, but He doesn't waste the hurt.

He delays, why? **To bring Mary and Martha to the realization that Jesus is their only hope. It is through suffering that Jesus gains our highest attention**

As Anglican theologian C.S. Lewis writes: "Pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but He shouts to us in our pains. Suffering therefore is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Which is why Jesus sometimes will delay our healing, to penetrate our hearts with the message that He is our only hope. This is why Paul says in Corinthians: If we are afflicted, it is for our comfort and salvation! I know it's counterintuitive, but Jesus comforts through delay to teach his people to trust in him with all their might. It reminds me of the Old Testament story of Gideon, God reduces Gideon's army to increase Gideon's trust In God!

God delays, reduces, prunes, to say I am your source of strength more than anyone or anything else. His delays are delays of love. His silence are the silences of love, to beckon us to come closer to Him.

- Declaration-
- Doesn't Anger-
- Delay is God's way..

Finally, forget words, sometimes we just need to see it. So Jesus comforts by sheer demonstration! Jesus delays until everyone knows that Lazarus is dead. Then BAM! Jesus brings Lazarus back to life so everyone can experience the full bouquet and power of His love! "Lazarus come out!" Looking like a Halloween trick or treater, there He is, fully alive! One commentator said thank God Jesus says "Lazarus" come out. Had Jesus just given a generic "Come out" order, all the bodies in that tomb would have come back to life!

Jesus **demonstrates** His power. If you're suffering this morning, I want you to recall those moments in your life when Jesus demonstrated, intervened and brought healing to you. You know, the name Satan means thief. Satan not only steals our joy, but he steals our memories, giving us spiritual amnesia, causing us to forget how God has DEMONSTRATED HIS LOVE FOR US in the past!

Recall the demonstrations of God's intervention in your life. To those suffering in your life, share these stories with them! Whisper to them how God demonstrated His power in your life. Share a failure even, and how you realized that

failure was not fatal because of God's intervention. "The Father has comforted us so that we comfort others in any trouble."

Demonstrate! Demonstrate by doing what Jesus did. **Bob, Sue..in the Name of Jesus, be healed!**

As we engage our city through an emboldened comfort, in the name of Jesus and in the spirit of Billy Graham **declare** that death is never the end! Allow them to weep on your shoulder, **do not** anger! Disciple them about **delay** and God's timing. Finally, **demonstrate** from Scripture and from your life, demonstrate healing!

My friends, you will hear from others, God couldn't possibly know how I feel. Maybe you're in that place today. Here's what you need to know: This miracle of healing Lazarus is the last miracle Jesus conducts before His own suffering through the crucifixion. In fact it would be the very miracle that triggers the resolve of the Jewish leaders to have Jesus arrested and tried for blasphemy. Jesus knows the extent of our suffering because He's been there. Our healing would cost Him His life. You can trust him with your suffering. Take it to Him. He died to receive it.

I end with the story of Tokichi Ishii. He was a horrible man and had murdered men, women and children in a brutal way. He was in a Tokyo prison awaiting death but while there God sent two Canadian women to talk to him between the bars. He only glared at them savagely. Eventually the women gave up and gave him a Bible to read. He began to read it, but soon found he couldn't stop. When Tokichi gets to the story of the Crucifixion and reads the words of Jesus, "Father forgive them they know not what they do." He in response would write this in his journal:

I stopped: I was stabbed to the heart, as if by a five-inch nail. What did the verse reveal to me? Shall I call it the love of the heart of Christ? Shall I call it His compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that with an unspeakably grateful heart I believed.

Tokichi would end his life with these words: *Locked up in a prison cell six by nine feet in size, I am infinitely happier than I was in the days of my sinning when I did not know God. Day and night . . . I am talking with Jesus Christ.*

My friends...

- Declare
- Don't get angry
- Delay is God's way of doing deeper heart surgery in us...
- And Demonstrate demonstrate, demonstrate!

Let us pray.