

Ezekiel 37:1-14

John 11:1-45

Romans 8:6-11

“Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord.  
Hear our voice.” AMEN!

Remember the popular television  
show from the 80’s called  
“The A-Team?”

It was an hour long show each week  
that focused on four characters.

Ex-military soldiers from Vietnam, who  
were on the run from the military police for  
crimes they didn’t commit.

Even though they were on the run  
from the government authorities,

they always stopped to help the little guy battle  
against the local, corrupt bigwig.

And on each Tuesday night, they’d complete  
their help for the person, just quickly enough  
to escape the Military Police.

The actor George Peppard played the character  
of John “Hannibal” Smith,  
who was the cunning leader of the “A-Team.”

If you know the show, then you probably know

the line that John “Hannibal” Smith often said  
toward the end of an episode.

His catch phrase was:

I love it when a plan comes together.

I kept thinking this while reading the  
scripture lessons assigned for today because  
Jesus had it all planned out.

The delay in his departure had purpose,  
the teaching to his disciples about  
the “Son of Man being glorified,” made the point,

and Jesus’ full awareness that being near  
Jerusalem meant he was going to be in great danger.

Yet, most all of us know, things  
don’t always go as planned.

There is the truth that Jesus was working a loving,  
and larger plan in John 11 that only came together  
at the tomb,

not when Mary and Martha wanted it. (Pause)

John’s account of the raising of Lazarus sends us  
so many different questions.

First there’s the delay.

Two whole days Jesus tarried.

Why not leave immediately?

Why not heal Lazarus from afar?

What must have felt like neglect was/is  
now an invitation for us to lean  
into the complexities of death and loss.

As we find Martha, the ever present  
go-getter and hard worker.

Of course, she's the first of the sisters to go to Jesus.

And there's anger and disappointment  
in her words to Jesus.

Jesus makes the attempt to reason with her,  
"Your brother will rise again."

Martha knew this, but she didn't fully know  
what Jesus would do.

Most of us have been around serious illness,  
and with the death of a loved one, and  
we've had someone tell us

"they're in a better place," and that  
"this body is just a shell," or

that “God needed another angel.”

I’ve told these truths,  
but quickly learned that they don’t take away  
the hurt, despair, and grief.

That shell of a body was what  
we used to be able to hug, love on, and  
their presence filled the room.

The “better place” cliché doesn’t recognize that  
the place we had was pretty good, and  
can’t God find a different angel? (Pause)

Today’s, lesson is the last one before Holy Week.

Beginning on Passion/Palm Sunday  
we will move to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Today gives us the opportunity of space to grieve,  
just like Jesus did,  
prior to that emotionally charged week. (Pause)

Miss Heidi, the Sunday School teacher  
for 1st and 2nd graders gave an assignment  
to her class.

Memorize one Bible verse.

Little Johnny chose John chapter 11 verse 35.

“Jesus began to weep.”

Some translations are even shorter: Jesus wept. :-)

In that short verse, the build up of  
emotion burst forth from Jesus.

Jesus did not only weep,  
but he burst into tears.

Jesus gives permission for us to do the same thing  
when sadness and anger and confusion fills us.

Permission to fall apart. (Pause)

There are all sorts of reasons why Jesus burst into tears.

Perhaps, being around so many  
who were sad touched him.

Perhaps, he realized though he'd  
raise Lazarus that day,  
he would eventually die.

Or maybe the flood of emotion came over him  
because he knew that what he was about to do,  
raise Lazarus to life, was going to be  
the action that set in motion  
his own death and burial.

A plan was coming together. (Pause)

Beloved, we live in that delay.

When we feel like there is no plan, only absence.

The resurrection story of Lazarus reassures us  
that with God, there is always  
a plan coming together.

AMEN!