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Lent V  
March 22, 2026  
Text: John 11:17 – 53  
Title: It's All His Fault!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. It happened when I was a young boy, but I can vaguely remember the first time that I was in a funeral home. It was for one of my relatives that I don't really remember, and the Irish side of my family had a nice long wake, of course. I remember being pretty bored with not much to do, and I also remember how it felt – the mood of the adults that were there gave it an air that was obviously different. Painfully different. They were all very much on edge, and short with the pent up energy of us younger kids. They didn't have much patience with us at all.

There was also something different about the way that everyone was talking with each other. My family was rarely quiet when they got together, but they were all acting differently that day. They used hushed language and timid tones. My normally boisterous family was unusually quiet, hardly speaking above a whisper in the subdued light of the room.

Of course, I know now that their strange behavior was because of death. Death hung over the whole place like a cloud. I know it's not a big surprise to hear that. It was a funeral home, but as a kid experiencing it for the first time, it was striking to me. Death's influence, its finality, its merciless advance into the life of somebody that my family loved touched every heart there, and it left a trail of sorrow and grief all around.

I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. Each of us can probably remember our first encounter with death, one of our greatest enemies as mortal people. And those memories are probably brought back to you whenever death touches your life in some way. It's why there's so much fear and anxiety surrounding death. It's death that will make your emotions overflow like

the flood waters of the Mississippi. Those feelings burst through your mental barriers, and go every which way. You lose control, and find yourself at a loss. What do you do now? Which way do you turn? How can you go on with life when your entire world is turned upside down? Whose fault is it?

It's that last question that we always seem to want an answer to. You look all around for a target to unleash your pain and hurt on. You want somebody that you can lash out at and blame for the painful loss that you suddenly find yourself having to deal with. And more often than not, the target that you and I find to be the most convenient is God.

These are the times when some of the hardest questions of life come out. If God is so loving, how could He let this happen? If God really controls everything, why did He make this happen? How come God didn't listen to my prayers? These are the questions that our fallen race constantly wrestles with, and as we look at the history of the Scriptures we find that these questions are nothing new, even for the giants of the faith such as Abraham, David and Job.

Today's Gospel reading finds yet another family facing death, this great enemy of humanity. Martha and Mary have sat and watched their brother, Lazarus, draw his last, ragged breath. They have prepared his body for burial, and watched as it was placed in the cave and sealed off with a large stone. Over the course of four days, they have shed countless tears and mourned the loss of their dear brother. They hoped and prayed for him to be healed, and they sent a message to the only man that they knew could help them all, Jesus. But it was too late. Lazarus' last hour had come and gone, and he had now rotted in a tomb for four endless days.

Now, two days after He has gotten the message that His dear friend Lazarus is dying, Jesus finally decides to go to them. It's hard not to be a bit puzzled and maybe even shocked at the seemingly callous attitude of Jesus. Doesn't He realize that the man is dying? Doesn't He

care that Martha and Mary are scared, suffering and mourning as they watch their lives collapse around them? Doesn't He understand that everyone is counting on Him to keep Lazarus alive? This family has put their trust and faith in Jesus, and He has let them all down. Lazarus is still dead, and their prayers and pleas have gone unanswered.

John tells us that before Jesus even got to the house, He was met by Martha. And Martha's first words must have pained Jesus very deeply. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Martha has not pulled any punches. Her brother is dead and in the grave, and she has mourned for him four pain filled days. She had put all of her hope in Jesus, and He was four days too late. She knows that Jesus could have saved Lazarus, but now she won't see him again until the resurrection on the last day and that's just not good enough. Lazarus is dead, and it's all the fault of the man standing in front of her right now. She blames Jesus.

Mary's reaction to seeing her Lord isn't much different. Faithful Mary, who listened to Jesus while Martha did the housework and was praised for doing so. Mary has to be called out of the house to see Him now. She quickly answers the summons and goes to see Jesus, but her words have the same harshness as Martha's, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She has a target for her pain and anger, and she is not holding back. She blames Jesus.

What a very human thing to do, and by human I also mean sinner. When the effects of sin face us full bore, like at the death of a loved one or in the middle of a war or a pandemic, we blame God for the trouble and the pain that we're experiencing. It's all His fault that everything in life is going wrong. You don't deserve to suffer. If He would just answer your prayers the

way you want Him too, then nothing bad would ever happen, right? You'd have enough money, everyone would stay healthy, and you'd never have to experience any suffering or pain.

That's the way that we think life should be, but it's not. Thanks to the fallen, sinful nature of man, pain and suffering are a guarantee in this world. There is no way to avoid it, even if you have the strongest faith in Jesus. Even Jesus couldn't avoid it. All we can do is endure, and focus the blame on our favorite target, God. It happened when Adam blamed God for giving Him Eve, and it continues to be our standard response today. It's all His fault.

There's something that we're missing here though. Mary and Martha are placing the blame at Jesus feet, to be sure, but they're also showing incredible faith in Him. They are displaying the ever present Christian paradox of being sinners and saints at the same time. Their words certainly have an air of accusation to them, but there is also no doubt displayed in them either. They *know* that Jesus could have saved Lazarus if He had just made it there in time. Their bold and certain words display the level of faith that they do have in Jesus, even as they betray their grief and pain and blame the Savior.

In this account, it's Martha who shows us the way of the faithful disciple of Jesus instead of her sister, Mary. After she accuses Him, she continues with these words of faith, "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you...I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God..." And in the middle of this conversation with the Lord, He declares some of the sweetest Gospel words ever recorded, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

Then Jesus goes to the tomb, and as He approaches the grave of His dear friend the Greek says that His body literally shook. He didn't just cry a little or get choked up. He sobbed. He

trembled and wept just like any other person would do, just like He was one of us because He *is* one of us. Our God became a man. He sympathizes with us in our weakness, and He shares our grief. He knows what it is to grieve because He's been there before, at the tomb of Lazarus.

But it is here that He gives us all a preview of what is to come. He brings Lazarus back from the dead. In the face of pain and doubt and blame, Jesus displays His ultimate power over both life and death. He shows that the grave has no power over those who are faithful to Him no matter how they die, and He shows that death's grip over humanity is about to come to a screeching halt.

With the hour of His own death approaching as the Council plots against Him on behalf of the entire nation, Jesus shows that what has happened to Lazarus will not be permanent. He shows us a sneak preview of what is coming on Easter Sunday, and what will ultimately happen when the Savior comes again to speak to us in the dust of the earth the same words that He spoke to His friend, Lazarus, "Come out." The work of Christ here lets all of us know for certain that God has the final say over everything in His creation, including and especially life and death.

When Jesus rose from the grave on that first Easter Day, He showed us all that our enemies were defeated. All sins were paid for. The power of death was forever broken when it couldn't hold Him in the grave, and the devil's grip on sinners was gone for good. Jesus came that we might have eternal life in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, and as we come to the end of another Lenten season we prepare once again to celebrate the victorious sacrifice of the only man who was ever truly blameless and who defeated death for us all, Jesus the Christ. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.