

“The Anxiety is Killing Me . . . ”

John 11:1-45

March 29, 2020

The year is 1949 and the play "Waiting for Godot" was written. Now I was a little young to see it but I remember hearing a lot of buzz about the film that was released about 20 years ago. Robin and I waited for a little bit for the buzz to die down and then we went to see it. I'm not sure if you know the play or the movie, but it's part tragedy and part comedy. The heroes converse during the 2 hours waiting for Godot, who never appears, but gives clues that he will arrive soon. While they wait, the heroes discuss reasons for their existence and hope that Godot will offer insight. But, since Godot never arrives, they do not discover the meaning of life.

After watching the movie, we read the critic's reviews to see if their opinions were in line with ours. Roger Ebert gave it a thumbs up, both Robin and I gave it two thumbs down. We both felt that we had lost 2 hours watching this movie that we both thought, was tedious.

Many people find the play tedious, just like Robin and I found the movie to be, but the author's purpose, I guess was to it create anxiety in the audience. He wanted the audience to be anxious. Anxious is a word that best describes the state people are in, when they are nervous, worried, feeling uneasy, or apprehensive. Those are the feelings that many of us are feeling right now, as we self-isolate during this COVID-19 crisis.

The Gospel lesson, the raising of Lazarus, may have this effect as well. As you listened to this story, did you feel a little tension about Jesus' overdue arrival at Bethany?

The maddening thing about John's story is Jesus' apparent nonchalance about arriving at Bethany. It is like watching the play "Waiting for Godot" - we wait and wait and wait - and then wait some more. All those who read or hear John's story keep speculating: "What is wrong with Jesus? Why is it taking him so long to get into high gear?" This waiting on Jesus creates anxiety. We, the readers, really want Jesus to "put the pedal to the metal".

We humans, know a lot about anxiety. We talk about our anxieties. Much of a believer's prayer life is focused upon those things that worry us or make us anxious. Did you know that an average person's anxiety is focused on:

- things that will never happen (40 percent)
- things about the past that can't be changed (30 percent)
- criticism by others, mostly untrue (12 percent)
- health, which gets worse with stress (10 percent)
- real problems that will be faced (8 percent)

I believe that the virus outbreak in our world in 2020 is definitely increasing the anxiety of the people of the world and if the per-centages are correct, that's about 18% of our anxiety is focussed on COVID-19.

One of the greatest problems for most us, is living between life's urgencies and their resolution. Faith enters here. Faith trusts and believes that God reconciles all things. John's Gospel suggests this by Jesus' phrase "my hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). This implies that the time is not yet right for revealing Jesus and his identity. This revelation will occur, but only when God's time becomes our time. Most people have difficulty living between moments of urgency and resolution. These times make us anxious.

For Martha and Mary, Jesus' assurance is that he is the resurrection and the life. This promise is one that they can count on because they know Jesus and trust him. God empowers Jesus to raise Lazarus to show people who Jesus is. We want Jesus to snap his fingers at the beginning of this story and bring Lazarus back to life. But we, must allow God to work through time, pain, and our own limited understanding, to bring about the resurrection. This story gives us so much time to stew because in this account of Jesus and Lazarus, God indicates to us how much we need God. The title of this story in John's Gospel is "The Raising of Lazarus," but it could just as easily be called "Waiting for Jesus" or even "Waiting for God[ot]."

Waiting for Jesus or waiting for God to work in our lives is never easy. Perhaps we shall always be anxious about it. However, we know God will act - we just don't know when or how! The most believers can confess is that we believe in God and trust God in God's good time. While we wait, we can develop a strategy for addressing our anxiety.

Charles Spurgeon suggested one way to deal with human worry. He told of how, in 480 BCE, the out-manned army of Sparta's King Leonidas held off the Persian troops of Xerxes by fighting them one at a time as they came through a narrow mountain pass. Commenting on this strategy, Spurgeon said, "Suppose Leonidas and his handful of men had gone out into the wide-open plain and attacked the Persians - why, they would have died at once, even though they might have fought like lions." Spurgeon continued by saying that Christians stand in today's narrow pass. If Christians choose to battle every difficulty at the same time, they're certain to suffer defeat. But if Christians trust God and take their troubles on - one by one, they will find that their strength in God is sufficient.

Jesus took his time to get to Lazarus' tomb for one reason - the reason he stated at the beginning of this story: "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (11:4). It may make us anxious, but it is God's power that saves us - in God's own time.