

Follow Jesus in New Life

✠ blessed sleep (vv.1-16)

✠ resurrection faith (vv.17-27)

In the Name of Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, dear friends and family of God:

Why would anyone leave New Life? In the past few weeks we've lost some members. Thankfully, most continue to **Follow Jesus in New Life**. They've moved away and found a church of our fellowship where they will continue to hear God's Word in its truth and purity. In a few cases, years of pastoral care to bring them closer to the fire of God's love in Christ have not had the desired effect. For unexplained reasons they request "release" rather than "transfer." God alone can judge the heart, yours and mine too. Jesus counseled His disciples: *"Whoever listens to you listens to Me. Whoever rejects you rejects Me. And whoever rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me."* (Luke 10:16 HCSB) Pastors are not to take it personally or be resentful. (2 Timothy 2:24) But given my background, I am baffled.

When we joined the Wisconsin Synod my 7th grade year, my heart was filled with fear. Over the years God has used Wisconsin Synod pastors and professors to point me to Christ, soothing my fears and giving me peace. It's a matter of personal conviction for me to **Follow Jesus in New Life**. Here I can hear my Savior's voice without the noise of human opinion. I even enjoy...

✠ blessed sleep (vv.1-16)

We hear how Jesus waited after getting the news of Lazarus' illness. You might scratch your head at His comment: *"This sickness will not end in death, but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* As the all-knowing Son of God, Jesus knew it was a deadly illness. John comments: *"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶Therefore when he heard Lazarus was sick, he stayed right where he was two more days."* His love made Him stay away?

Did you catch that in today's Old Testament Lesson from Hosea (5:15 – 6:6)? *"Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me."* We're too much like that cartoon of an angry face praying, "God give me patience – now!" God waits to produce in us earnest, repentant faith. So His love kept Him away from Lazarus and his sisters. And the results were wonderful for faith. What's sad is how quickly some people give up on God. They get excited about church, but if God doesn't do what they want, when they want, they look for preachers to tell them what they want to hear. We are all sheep who love to wander.

"Lord, the one you love is sick." The sick ones are the ones Jesus helps like the tax collector Matthew (9:9-13) in today's Gospel Lesson. In sickness we often see God's mercy where no sacrifice or money can cure the body, much less the soul. Against that dark night, God's love shines brightest of all.

Jesus' disciples are worried. *"Rabbi, just recently the Jews were trying to stone you. And you're going back there?"* But Jesus' insight has steeled many a Christian warrior in battle and persecution. *"Aren't there twelve hours of daylight? If anyone walks around during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰But if anyone walks around at night, he does stumble, because the light is not in him."* Nothing can hurt you until your time comes. But don't look for light on the inside. True light can only be found in Him who is the Light of the world. He turns on the light at night.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from draft translations for the Wartburg Project – Matthew, John.

What our Lord's disciples say about sleep is so true. It helps us get well. I even heard a statistic that sleep deprived Americans are insulin resistant like type-2 diabetics. Good sleep hygiene is important. But doesn't that make it more scary when you can't sleep? Some sleep medications admit in the fine print, they make you agitated. Thank-you very much! When I was in grade school, I was so afraid I might not be able to fall asleep that I couldn't sleep! That's when my mother introduced me to the Psalms. *"In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves."* *"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."* (Psalm 127:2; 4:8 NIV84) Could it be that sometimes God waits to bring you comfort because He is acting like the Lover of your soul? I'm convinced God knows the secret of some women who play "hard to get." It makes good men crazy to date them. As the Lover of our bodies and souls, God wants us to earnestly seek Him at all hours. A few hours of deep sleep are far better than a night of tossing and turning. Get up. Spend some quality time alone with the Lord in prayer and Bible study. Then in the warmth of His Word-*embrace you can sleep like a baby until the dawning of another day of grace.*

Finally Jesus had to tell His disciples plainly, *"Lazarus is dead."* But then He added, *"And I am glad for your sake that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let's go to him."* Don't you love fatalistic doubting Thomas: *"Let's go too so we can die with him."* Only God can create and grow...

✠ resurrection faith (vv.17-27)

Comfort was all around for sisters Martha and Mary. Jews from Jerusalem walked out the two-mile road to console them as best they could. But what could they really say? Some maybe remembered the God-inspired Easter message of Job: *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"* (Job 19:25–27 NIV84) Redeeming grace meant the sisters could look forward to seeing Lazarus again in the final resurrection.

But Jesus made their **resurrection faith** shine most bright in this crisis. Listen to Martha: *"I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you."... "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the Last Day."... "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who comes into the world.""*

That's how it was for Abraham in our Second Lesson (Romans 4:18-25). Faith is credited as righteousness. You know you need faith, but as one of our Seminary professors is quoted, "When I look for my faith, the buggie hides." It helps to ask this question: "If you were to die tonight, are you sure you would go to heaven?" Or to put it another way: "If God were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say?" Some answer correctly: "Because Jesus died for me." Yet they are not sure they will go to heaven. Why? Because we can't always be sure of our faith. We can only be sure of God's promises. Faith is like a treasure buried in the back yard. It's there, but you may not know it. The fact that you want faith shows God is already working in you. (Philippians 2:13) Remember the classic prayer of the man for Jesus to heal his son: *"Lord, I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief!"* (Mark 9:24)

God reveals and strengthens **resurrection faith** during times of trial. Abraham *"against all hope believed"* that God would give them a son even though he and Sarah were way past childbearing age. My cousin Rachel's **resurrection faith** shown in her choice of funeral text: *"Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases...."* (Psalm 103:1–3 NIV84) Her pastor said he wondered, "Doesn't she know she's terminal?" then realized, "She's looking forward to the resurrection."

Next week our pericope Scriptures Lessons relate to John 12 as we *Pray for Workers* in ripe harvest fields. Then in two weeks we will finish the story of Lazarus in John 11:28-57, as Jesus reassures us that we are *Worth More Than Many Sparrows*. Until then, *"Wait on the LORD."* Amen.