

“The Crossroads of Faith”

John 11:1-16

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Communion Devotion

Our attention this morning is drawn to one of the most gripping stories in the Fourth Gospel. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were some of Jesus’ dearest friends, and Lazarus was sick.

It appears Jesus was a guest in Lazarus’ home on many occasions, especially when he visited Jerusalem. Bethany was about two miles east of the city, which made it possible for Jesus to move freely about Jerusalem while having privacy when he needed to rest.

Evidently, Mary and Martha realized the severity of Lazarus’ situation and sent word to Jesus of his illness. You get the feeling these two sisters expected Jesus to come immediately to help Lazarus, but Jesus did not do this. Instead, he waited two days before beginning the journey to Bethany to check on his friends.

There has been much speculation about why Jesus delayed his departure. In some ways, this seemed uncharacteristic of him.

I wonder if Jesus spent those two days praying about what God would have him do. There was more at stake here than the death of Lazarus and the grief of his sisters, and Jesus had to take many things into consideration.

Returning to Jerusalem was like walking into the eye of a storm. The authorities were furious with him over his stinging criticisms of them, and they were threatened by his popularity. They tried to arrest him on previous visits, but he slipped away. This would not always be the case, though, and one day the religious leaders would succeed in arresting and crucifying Jesus.

When Jesus heard about Lazarus’ illness, he needed wisdom and guidance to know how he should respond. Going to Jerusalem at this time would put his life at risk again and endanger the disciples. Did God want Jesus to go anyway to help his friends and show the disciples that God had given him power over death?

If so, then Jesus needed not only wisdom and guidance but also strength and courage. The challenges Jesus would face raising Lazarus from the dead and enduring the hostile reaction of the religious authorities would be demanding. Only with God's help could he meet these challenges head on, which is why I believe he spent these two days seeking God's will and support.

When Jesus announced he was going to Bethany to help his dearest friends at the conclusion of these two days, the disciples were not pleased. They tried to dissuade him, knowing their lives would be in danger, too.

Nothing the disciples said deterred Jesus, though. Jesus told them he was going to Bethany even if he had to go alone. At this point in the story, Thomas spoke up and boldly declared, "Let us go and die with him."

To me, this is one of the most profound and powerful statements uttered by a disciple. Rarely do we witness this degree of loyalty and commitment by anyone for any reason. Thomas, however, was unwilling to let Jesus march into the eye of the storm alone. He would accompany him even if it cost him his life.

Do you think this was a tough decision for Thomas to make? You know it was. It had to be the most agonizing decision he had ever made. No one marches into the eye of a storm casually.

As a matter of fact, I think all the disciples were agonizing over what to do. It is obvious no one wanted to be the first to declare his plans. Even Peter, the impulsive talker who was never at a loss for words, was speechless. Finally, Thomas broke the silence and announced he would go back to Jerusalem and die with Jesus.

Why do you think Thomas made this decision? He made a commitment to follow Jesus and help him anyway he could. Along this journey, he learned to love this man who had shown him a new way of thinking, believing and living.

The thought of Jesus going to Jerusalem alone was more than Thomas could bear. Friends don't forsake friends when they need them the most. This was not the time to abandon the man who had done so much for him.

As hard as marching into the eye of the storm would be, disappointing Jesus would be harder. His commitment to Jesus was not just for the good times; it was for all time. Jesus had taught him to confront his fears with faith instead of letting them control him. Now was the time to do this.

"Let us go and die with him," Thomas said.

Perhaps you find yourself today where Thomas was in our text. You are at a crossroads, and you are agonizing over what to do.

You made a promise which is demanding more of you to fulfill than you ever dreamed.

You accepted a challenge which is now bigger than you envisioned.

You signed up for a class which requires more of your time to excel or maybe just receive a passing grade.

You made changes in your lifestyle the first of the year which have become increasingly hard to maintain.

You have a family member or friend who is struggling and needs more support than you intended to provide.

You are in a marriage which requires more of your time and energy to sustain, and you are wondering if it is worth it.

You recommitted your life to Christ fully intending to be a more faithful disciple, and you are being tempted to return to those old, familiar habits.

What challenge or situation are you facing which demands your highest level of commitment, the kind Thomas displayed? What are you going to do?

Why not begin by doing what I believe Jesus and Thomas did. Spend time in prayer seeking God's will and wisdom. Ask God for the strength and courage you need to do what is best in the face of mounting pressure to do what is easy.

You have the opportunity to begin this conversation with God this morning as the tray and cup are passed. I encourage you to take advantage of it and assure you God is eager to help you make the best decision.

"Let us go and die with him," Thomas said. God help us to be this strong and courageous.