

„What was Jesus thinking?” John 11:1-45

Last week we meditated upon the healing of a blind man, and how in spite of this incredible sign, the Pharisees refused to accept what was obvious, - that Jesus was who He claimed to be, God's Christ, our Redeemer.

We talked about the fact that we can't choose to become Christians, nor we can make anyone a Christian, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our faith is God's gift. Infinitely precious gift.

When Jesus' disciples asked Him whose sins caused this man's blindness, Jesus answered that he wasn't blind because of anyone's sin, but so that the glory of God can be revealed. Also this week's event, according to Jesus' words, happened so that the glory of God can be revealed.

When John's gospel talks about glory of God, it talks about it in a sense that through Jesus' ministry God reveals Himself. Glory of God is revealed when Jesus acts as true God, the Son of the Father, when His works reveal who He truly is.

Thus also today, meditating upon this event we'll try to see how glory of God is revealed in this event, how did people react to this revelation, and what comfort and joy this revelation gives to us. How God's glory is revealed, how people reacted and what comfort this event gives to us?

There was a family in a village named Bethany. This Bethany was located just two miles from Jerusalem. Obviously this family was very dear to Jesus. Now, a man named Lazarus was sick and his sisters Martha and Mary sent a message to Jesus.

Jesus at that time was some four days' walk away from Bethany. He was staying this far from Jerusalem, for as we can read at the end of chapter 10, the Jews just tried to kill Him.

What follows may seem to be a bit strange. Jesus received the message, He loved this family, but He still remained in the same place for two days. Why? How could His disciples interpret it?

First, Jesus Himself said that this illness will not lead into death. So Lazarus should have been fine even if Jesus was not present. Besides, we need to remember, that the

Jews just tried to stone Jesus. It seemed reasonable to keep a distance from a place where people try to kill you. This is how Jesus disciples may have perceived it.

That's why they were so surprised when after two days Jesus said: „Let's go to Judea.” Why? They just tried to stone you. ‘Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I go to awaken Him’.

You may wonder, why didn't Jesus go earlier? He could have been able to save him. Not true. See, Jesus was four days walk from Bethany. Even if they had left immediately, then by the time they arrived, Lazarus would have been dead already for two days.

Still doesn't make sense? Why initially hesitate, but then go there? As Jesus said: „It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” To glorify Jesus, remember, it means to reveal who He truly is.

To give evidence, to prove, to show people who He truly is. That's why Jesus said to His disciples, „I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.” That you may believe!

If He had arrived two days earlier and ‘awakened’ Lazarus, doubters could have said that Lazarus maybe wasn't really dead. But now, when He had lied in the grave already for four days, and there was already a bad odour, it was different.

One thing is to heal someone, whatever is this sickness. Another to heal someone who had been blind from birth. But even more incomprehensible is to awake someone who had been dead already for four days and was already in a process of decomposition.

So they arrived to Bethany and Martha came to meet them. Jesus said: „Your brother will rise again.” To what Martha just replied: „I know, I know, he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

No, Martha, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies (here) and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’

Martha: „Yes, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” Yes, but did she really believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Did she?

Do we really believe that at His return, at the end of time and world as we know it, Jesus will raise us all from the dead and will give us new, perfect bodies, to enjoy life in renewed and beautiful world, without sin, death and sufferings. In God’s presence, in peace and joy, in never-ending joy. Do we believe it?

Because if not, then as the apostle Paul said, if we look for Jesus help in this life only, we are the most miserable of all people. For the Father in Jesus has granted us something unbelievably great, the forgiveness of all our sins.

And through this forgiveness He restores us in relationships with Him, who is the source of all life. And if we are united with Him by His Holy Spirit, and we are united with Him in our baptism, we have promised eternal life in God’s presence.

This and nothing less in our ultimate hope. Nothing less, but living in the Kingdom of God. This is what Jesus revealed to us. This is what He came to give us. To you! Just receive it, just trust Jesus promises, and He won’t fail you. He will never let you down. Never, ever.

We don’t know what Martha believed, as she left right after Jesus asked this question and went to announce Mary, that Jesus was there. But Martha definitely didn’t expect what was going to follow.

Shortly Mary came together with many Jews who had come to comfort her, at least some of them from Jerusalem. She came weeping and Jews accompanied her were weeping as well. And here we have interesting thing in the text. Seems that for whatever reason translators been struggling to choose a right word.

When Jesus saw them all weeping He, and different translation offers ‘was deeply moved’ or ‘greatly distressed’, but in Greek there is the word that rather means ‘he was upset’ or ‘moved by anger’.

Why was Jesus upset? Why was He angry? Angry about what or to whom? Many explanations have been given. That He was angry to sin, for His lost friend, angry

to death, to the corruption of God's good creation. All of these probably are correct and valid explanations.

But there may be a simpler one. If only we look at this event closely. This situation looked very different from Jesus perspective. Very different. He knew as clearly as possible that this life is not an end in itself. It is a time given to nations to search for God, for He is not far from us.

But then comes the restoration of entire creation, the ultimate reality, when all who have said 'yes' to God's invitation, who have put trust on Jesus will feast with Him in joy and total wellbeing. Forever. This is what Jesus had been teaching to His disciples, His friends, probably also to Lazarus and his sisters.

Perhaps He knew that Lazarus as a pious man was already enjoying God's holy presence, that he already was in far better place and in far better company. We are not told what Lazarus experienced during these four days, and how happy, or rather unhappy he was when called back to this life.

But now Jesus beloved friends were weeping for Lazarus as if this life was everything. As if He was gone forever. Hadn't they heard what Jesus been teaching?

Didn't they believe that Jesus was the resurrection and life! This is no wonder that looking at their reactions Jesus was upset. 'Are you listening to me at all!' How long am I to bear with you, you faithless generation?' (Mat 17:17)

So Jesus wept. When we read it and try to understand what was going on, this doesn't sound right. Jesus was angry and Jesus wept. How to put these two together? Actually easily.

Jews interpreted Jesus weeping as a sign of His love to Lazarus. That's probably correct, but that's not all. He wept because of the unbelief of His loved ones. We can picture it well as parents of grownups.

Think about your children doing something harmful for themselves, whatever it may be. Aren't you angry? 'How can you be such fools after all these years when we tried to teach you the best!' But at the same time, - isn't your heart bleeding, aren't you weeping about them... for you love them. And Jesus loved them.

There is interesting detail in John's account. The comment the Jews made. „Could not he, who opened the eyes of the blind man, also have kept this man from dying?”

This small comment shows how public was Jesus ministry and His miracles. It wasn't something done in corner. Most of unbelievable things were done in public. Thus this recent event with Jesus opening the eyes of the blind man was well known even among the Jews, who had come to grieve for Lazarus.

Now, when they all were there, Jesus commanded to remove the stone that covered entrance into the tomb. „You will see the glory of God.” Meaning, it will be reveal who Jesus is.

When stone was removed, Jesus lifted up His eyes and said: „Father, I thank you that you have heard me ... (especially) on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

Lazarus, come out! „The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.” Before the eyes of many and many witnesses, some of them friendly to Jesus, some quite hostile.

We may have our own views on what is possible and what is not in this reality. Usually we just take over views of those whom we trust, or whom majority trust, without much thinking. But then comes a situation when you experience something that makes you re-evaluate what we really know about this world.

Thus after Lazarus was raised from the dead, ‘many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.’ As we can read in following verses, some of Jews went to Jerusalem and told the Pharisees what had happened.

High priests and the Pharisees gathered the council for they were worried. What to do? For this man performs many signs. They all knew it. They knew. Do you know what they were worried about? „If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him... and! the Romans will come and take away both *our* place and *our* nation.”

That's why they made this incredibly wise decision. If there is this man Jesus, who does all these signs, who does these divine miracles, who can even raise the dead,

let's get rid of Him before everyone begin to believe that He truly is the Son of God. Make sense, right?

But also, as great crowds went to Bethany to see Lazarus, whom Jesus was raised from the dead, they wisely decided to kill Lazarus as well. What a plan! They didn't succeed with Lazarus though.

He had to flee from Judea. According to the Church tradition, Lazarus fled to Cyprus and few years later apostle Paul and Barnabas appointed him as the first bishop of Cyprus.

Lazarus lived for more than thirty year after Jesus had raised him up, then he died and was buried for the second time, waiting for the true resurrection for the life eternal. In place of his grave now stands St. Lazarus church. You can go and visit it. It's beautiful.

But Jewish leaders succeeded with Jesus. They arrested Him, accused of being the Son of God, and crucified. But then... exactly as Jesus had foretold, after three days He pulled off largest mystery in the world history. He rouse from the dead. Not in a way He awoke Lazarus.

Jesus rose in new, glorified, unperishable body. It still was physical body. His disciples touched Him, He ate and drank with them, but He also could do things we can't with our bodies.

So what? Where it leaves us? Remember, we can't trust God on our own, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that dwelt in Jesus and in whose power Jesus rouse from the dead, the same one is given to us. To you!

If you believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord, God's only begotten Son, it means that the same Spirit dwells in you. And as we heard apostle Paul saying: „If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom 8:11) This is what it means for us, what it means for you.

These are the Good News, indeed. Let's rejoice in this gift of God, let's guard it, and wait for the Lord Jesus to return.

Amen.