

Sermon: Buried

Sunday, January 24, 2016

OBJECTIVE: We must bury our expectations and allow to God to direct us.

GLORY BE TO THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT, ONE TRUE GOD. AMEN.

We are unable to gather in the church this weekend because we have been struck with a terrible and wonderful blizzard that has showered over 30 inches of snow on Central New Jersey. And though nothing can replace the communal worship and fellowship that is found in the Divine Liturgy, I thought it would be beneficial if I can at least share a Sunday message with you all.

As we all sit by our windows gazing at the beauty and awe of God's creation being buried in a blanket of snow, we can't fail to realize the demise of all of the programs, events, and expectations that were planned for this weekend. In the Northeast, we live for our weekends. Our work and school weekdays are already so packed and busy that there is no time for anything additional. So, as we watch the snow bury the world around us, many mourn that their expectations for this weekend are also being buried with it.

Isn't this what we often find in life?

Reality failing to live up to our expectations. Our plans are constantly being changed or modified to deal with the shifting of our situation. Our plans fail. Our expectations are not realized.

They say that stress is the gap between our expectation and the reality.

For example, we expect an easy drive to work but we are faced with traffic, which causes stress.

Or, we always expected to be more successful, but we are stuck in a difficult financial situation.

Or, for our students, we expect that we will do well in school but we struggle to get the right grades, which causes stress.

Or, we expected our loved ones to live a long life, but they died before we ever could expect.

Why does the God who loves us allow our plans to fail? Why can't He meet our expectations?

These questions were probably asked by two sisters, Martha and Mary. They were friends of Jesus Christ.

They knew that their friend Jesus was special and had the ability to do amazing things. So, when their brother became ill, they sent for Jesus so that He could come heal their brother. They expected Jesus to come because of the love that He expressed in every action and word.

However, Jesus didn't come.

Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, died.

Four days after Lazarus' death, Jesus finally showed up.

Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

Martha is like many of us. She knows the faith from a rational level. She believes in her head. But her heart is still unsure. The words of her mouth express her belief but she must be disappointed that Jesus did not come earlier. If He has lived up to her expectation, then her brother would still be alive. Jesus has not met her expectation but she puts on a strong face and expresses her faith in Jesus.

Martha and Mary learned an important lesson that day that we need to remember. God's plans exceed their expectations. Martha and Mary witnessed Jesus Christ raise their brother from the dead. They had buried their brother and with him they buried the expectation that Jesus would heal their brother. But four days after burying their expectations, Jesus Christ revealed to them His plan.

Martha and Mary were blessed to only wait four days for God's plan to be revealed. Some of us will wait an eternity. As the Scriptures says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He began a chain of events that would lead Christ to His Cross. The raising of Lazarus was a miracle that revealed to the world that Jesus was no ordinary man or even a blessed prophet. The living and breathing Lazarus who was dead for four days was a witness to everyone who saw him that Jesus was the Messiah. The leaders of the Temple tried to not only kill Jesus but also attempted to kill Lazarus. Lazarus fled to Cyprus where he became bishop of the Church there. Little more is known about Lazarus after Our Lord's Resurrection and Ascension, except that during his thirty years after his resuscitation, he never smiled or joked except on one occasion, recorded in the Synaxarion. One day, he saw someone stealing a clay pot and he smiled saying, "the clay steals the clay"

We are the clay and God is the potter. We need to remember that.

If there is one thing we should take away from this weekend is to allow our expectations to die and allow our trust in God to flourish. Much of the stresses we face everyday would fade if we learn to live in the present with our hearts attentive to God.

So let us allow our expectations to be buried this weekend. Let us grow our faith in the love of God.

All Glory and Honor to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.