

Western PA Annual Conference

LAITY ADDRESS

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I want to talk with you about character traits, traits to help us in our ministry, but first to talk with you about someone that God used for a very special purpose.....Lazarus.

We all know this story—Jesus waited for 4 days to return and raise Lazarus from the dead.

Today, however, we are going to walk in Lazarus sandals for a while.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were a well to do, family, not rich, but.... They all loved Jesus and were very good “friends”. They

Also supported the teachings and travels of Jesus and his disciples, both spiritually and financially.

That pound of perfume that Lazarus’ sister used on Jesus was worth about \$50.00 and \$50.00 in those times was about a year’s pay; but Jesus was deserving of that and more—it seems like such a small amount. Ladies what does an ounce of nice perfume cost today???

Now imagine, put your self in his shoes, errrr... sandals--- it is the day after having been dead for 4 days... in a smelly old cave.... Jesus is long gone, you get out of bed and go outside and there is still this crowd of people hanging around. He doesn’t understand—he thinks that Jesus must be close by—but no the people are here to see **me--Lazarus.**

All of a sudden I have become very popular—maybe too popular. People were coming to the faith and following Jesus because I was raised from the dead, I did nothing but be a friend of Jesus; a very good friend.

Later, I walk into the center of town, you know, Bethany, my home town, and the crowds of people—most headed for Jerusalem because of the Passover—are stopping to try and get a look at me, the man who was dead for 4 days. I hear the “buzz”—you know—is that he—is that the man—isn’t he the man that.... This “Jesus”.... Raised from the dead.

What amazing power this... “Jesus”... must have.
Maybe we should try to learn a little more about this Jesus.

I heard all of this going on and wondered—why—why are they so interested in me—I didn’t do anything—Jesus is the one with all the power.
it still hasn’t sunk in.

On top of all of this is the witness spreading the word—the ones who were there—who saw—who rolled the stone away. And here I am—living proof of this miracle—perhaps

the greatest miracle Jesus has ever performed. I decide to turn around and head for home—but the crowds follow, trying to learn more about what has happened—about how I was miraculously raised from the dead in front of so many witnesses.

A couple more days go by and I am getting used to the people—boy, now I know how Jesus must feel sometimes when the crowds press him.

So many questions all at the same time

and then silenced when I speak.

Their faith grows stronger; I can hear it in their words.

But then I begin to hear the others—the chief priests have put the word on the street—that Jesus is not welcome in Jerusalem—as a matter of fact if he shows up, he could be put in prison.

How do I stop them—I'm just one man???

I don't have the power that Jesus has—what do I do—what do I do??

Oh no, this is getting worse—now they say they want to kill him.

now what.

Maybe Jesus will come back to Bethany and I'll help... no he surely knows better—they were pretty upset with him before.—he has to know, doesn't he—he seems to know everything.

Later in the house with my sisters ...Martha-----Martha—how many more days till Passover—7—boy you would think it was tomorrow with all this excitement and these crowds.

Does anyone know where Jesus is?? -----Why??? ----Because ...we have to tell him about the chief priests and their wild ideas.

Really marry—do you really think he knows all ready??

Ok-----ok I won't bother him with this.

The next day there is an even greater excitement to the crowds—I learn that Jesus is in Bethany.

Quickly, quickly we must prepare something for him he always comes to our house for rest.

Some of the crowds were outside before Jesus got there and I heard them saying that now the priests even want me dead—me Lazarus. -----Great—now what, well after we eat and Jesus gets his rest—I'll leave the area and the crowds will follow me and stay away from Jesus—at least he will be safe.

But you know what—he always knows what is going on and -----oh man---- look at all the people who are becoming followers of his teachings. They are just ignoring the Jewish priest---isn't it wonderful. Jesus must be so happy.

I just don't know what to do.

For as long as I have followed Jesus and been his friend—I have never seen this much excitement and such large crowds, wanting to hear more and learn of his teachings.

But me being around here only adds to the danger. I don't want to put Jesus in any more danger.

I'll just leave----I'll hide out till all this settles down----after Passover—the crowds will go home and the danger level will go down. That's it, I'll just disappear.

I love my friend Jesus too much to cause him any harm.

And so, we hear no more from Lazarus.

He was not heard of until he got sick, died and was raised from the dead. The writers do not mention him again and after the supper at Simon's—he is never heard from again.

So what kind or type of character had Lazarus developed? How did he become the man he was??

Ok---a few points:

1. God is god and you are not! Agree??
2. God knows more about anything and everything than you do!!! Agree????
3. God knows more about...you... than you know about yourself!!! Did I hit a nerve, see where I am going??
4. How about: god knows what character traits need to be developed in your life!!!
How does this feel???

Self-improvement is great-but-did we ever consider that we usually want to acquire the type of traits associated with a life of ease and prosperity!!!!!!!!!!!!

- A. We want to learn---generosity, which suggests we have so much wealth we can afford to give it away.
- B. We want to develop ---humility—, which means we 1st must achieve greatness in order to have something to be humble about!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- C. We want to be known for -----greatness—suggesting that god thru people or circumstance has been so kind to us that we should respond with appreciation.
- D. We want to reflect a tranquil spirit of contentment---which supposes that we have a fret free life of ease.

Right???

But what if god determines that we need to develop an entire different set of character traits?? And –what if the traits he has in mind can only be developed and forged in our live by adversity???? Sorta like Lazarus.

Patience is only developed in desperate times

Forgiveness—if everyone is nice to us all the time, you have no chance to forgive; to develop it is to take a few harsh, undeserved shots from others.

Integrity---sticking to moral principles even when it means you will suffer unjust adverse circumstances. There is no ethical dilemma if there is no downside. Integrity is forged in criticism and consequence.

Honesty—be truthful even when it is the unpopular thing to do. Honesty comes naturally if praise and rewards are involved. But you develop honesty only when things are harsh, when it would be easier to avoid the truth.

If you think you know what is best for yourself---then you can design your life anyway you want!! But..... If you truly believe god knows best for you---then you cannot pick and choose by disregarding what is important to god, some of the traits he has chosen can only be achieved in your life through harsh conditions!!!

You will never get better if you only pursue a life that is easier.

Tough times will not break you—they will make you.

God doesn't design hardship to make you fall flat...but he does hope to bring you to your knees!!

The character traits worth having are those you acquired at the cost of personal sacrifice. Lazarus didn't choose to die and to be raised. It just wasn't his character, but it was god's choice, Lazarus was an ordinary man.

He was not an apostle—or a teacher---or a leader—just an ordinary common man that loved Jesus and that Jesus loved back.

Sort of like you and me—ordinary. Lazarus did not understand how big of a role he played in Jesus' life----likewise neither does we.

But Lazarus had a strong faith and a very deep love for Jesus---enough that he wanted to keep the danger away from Jesus—even knowing that Jesus had the power to protect himself.

That is all Jesus wants from us—to have a strong faith and a deep love relationship with him—he will develop our character his way.

Roberto Clemente said “anytime you have an opportunity to make things better and you don't, you are wasting your time on this earth!!

Take the opportunities that god gives us—even the hard times—and let god develop the traits to go out and make things better---go make a disciple for Jesus---go make a disciple for Jesus. Amen