

Please Pray With Me: May the Words of my Mouth and the Meditations of all our Hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

The family from Bethany; Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus, were my favorite Bible characters the first time I ever read through the Bible myself, my sophomore year in high school. I have personally identified with Martha in both of her major scenes in Luke and John ever since. But, when I read this passage again recently, a line that pulls focus away from her for just a moment snagged all of my attention: “Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.” For the first time, it really sank in for me that the sisters do not meet Jesus alone in their grief.

They meet Jesus surrounded by their shared community, not in hopes that the community will somehow change the circumstances of this horrible loss, you see they do not have any frame of reference for what we, as return readers, know will come once Jesus arrives at that tomb, but they are there simply to be there. They are there because they are a community, and community means showing up. They are the witnesses to the grief of these sisters and their teacher, Jesus, before they ever become witnesses to the miracle. So let’s spend some time with this crowd, a crowd of Jewish folks from the areas in and around Jerusalem has as many identities and stories within it as it does people, just like this Church does.

They show up, as we do, knowing what it means to grieve, to hope, and to hold anger at the world and at God. You see, these folks existed inside an empire ruled by an undeclared dictatorship using military force against threats to that power both abroad and domestically. Those, like themselves, who were from conquered territories were regularly exploited to improve the lives of wealthy Roman society and to expand the popularity of their conqueror. They were shamelessly oppressed by a ruler who was seen as divine by his followers and whose treatment of them seemed not to be of consequence to their own neighbors. In remembering this, many of us in this room might be able to better see ourselves, our congregation, and our neighbors in the faces of this crowd. These are not community members coming from on high to offer pity from their overflowing happiness and ease of life; these are folks who come carrying with them their own grief so that no one has to do it alone, so that no one has to do it without being reminded that they are God's first and foremost in the face of unimaginable grief. They are there because they get it, but I think many of us know that showing up hurt is not easy for the members of this crowd. So, the question for me, that I've heard echoed in some of my conversations here recently, has been, how do you show up as the crowd of comforters when you're also grieving, when you're also uncertain, when you're also overwhelmed?

Now, you and I, Church of the Resurrection, have been witnesses to so much in the two years I've had the privilege of serving alongside you. We have seen miraculous baptisms, we've learned and laughed and cried in that parish hall, and we've most recently borne witness to the ways that the current powers that be have wounded each of us in this room and our neighbors again and again. Today, you and I, Church of the Resurrection, stand in very similar places in our lives. I am weeks away from my seminary graduation and am just on the precipice of my first clergy job back home in Texas. Y'all are a few weeks away from your own transition as you send your beloved Reverend Jo into retirement and thus stand on the precipice of what I truly believe will be an incredible new season of ministry with whoever will join you as your next rector. We're both in transition, and neither of us stands in a place of certainty, which is difficult. It is also beautiful, but we can take a moment here to acknowledge that, in all its beauty, uncertainty is difficult. Yet we look out at our neighbors and see, somehow, even more urgent, scary, and painful uncertainty in their faces. And, because I know you well now, I know that when you see great need around you, y'all help. We are both trying to show up for the most vulnerable and the most hurt in our community, just like the crowd did, and we are ourselves in the midst of all that it means to be people in a time like this. We've both been asking, in many different ways, how do we show up as the crowd of comforters when we're also grieving, when we're also uncertain, when we're also overwhelmed?

I often pray for y'all at compline time and I close my eyes and look around this room at all your typical seats and remember all that you are holding; lost jobs and betrayals by the government you gave your life to, illnesses and surgeries and new body parts that take adjusting to, babies born and grandkids spoiled, and all of it held alongside the urgent call this community regularly follows to serve your neighbors. And I think, if we look to Jesus in this story for the answer to how we could possibly be the crowd and Martha in the same breath, we see that the answer has always been to show up completely, to show up even if that means we show up without all of our composure or armor, to show up even if that means we weep as we proclaim resurrection. We show up even if it seems to be too little or too late, because we remember it is actually never too late for our God. It is never too late for our God who raised Lazarus after four days in the seal of the Tomb. When we look to the Jesus of this story, who performs the greatest miracle of all time, but does so with fresh tears on his cheeks and a pit of grief in his stomach, I want us to remember how miraculous it is that we ever show up for one another, with how tattered and pieced together we all often feel, and especially in days like this. This room, this place, the way that y'all have shown up and shown up real these past two years, has been a miracle to me and has often, even when I have not shown it, resurrected many dead hopes for what Church can be in my heart.

My own Bishop, Andy Doyle, recently reminded my diocese at convention that “while evil has no floor, goodness has no ceiling.” Yes, friends, we know that goodness has no ceiling because not only did our weeping Lord raise his long-dead friend to life in Bethany, but he did so on his own path to a grave that could never hold him. So let us continue, as our Lord Jesus did at a tomb about two miles outside Jerusalem’s gates, to show up, even if our tears flow, and proclaim life to a world overwhelmed by living death, because if we know one thing here, it is resurrection. **Amen.**