

11.7.21 AllSts If Only... But More

- Sometimes when I'm not in the mood for music, I tune into sports radio when I'm driving in the car
 - And I have to say, sports radio is a bit strange
 - Some of the hosts rant and scream like the most recent win or loss is the most important thing in the world
 - Some listeners seem to have no life outside of sports, as some of them call in again and again, and start their conversation with something like, "Mike, you may remember that I called last Tuesday..."
 - And while occasionally a woman calls in, most of the callers to sports radio are men – and I looked it up, 71% of sports radio listeners are men
 - 71% of listeners are men – that also means that many of the commercials are targeted at men
 - And those commercials reveal some of the issues in our lives
 - First there are all the beer and liquor commercials, not to say that women don't drink, but sports radio commercials really make it a "guy thing," and of course the tag line is, "Always drink responsibly," even though sports radio raves about tailgating before, during, and after a game
 - And then there are the commercials about relationships – commercials that tell you where you can buy a diamond engagement ring, where you can buy male pharmaceuticals, and if your relationship hits the skids, where you can get a good divorce lawyer who specializes in protecting men and getting what they deserve in a divorce settlement. Of course this really bugs me, because usually men come out better economically than women in a divorce
 - Finally there is one commercial in particular that targets human foolishness. The commercial advertises a company that will search the internet and social media for stupid and offensive things that you have said or posted, and remove them. The

company's tag line is "protect your future from your past!"

- And of course, both men women post bad stuff, women and men can mess up relationships, and anyone can engage in destructive or addictive drinking
- *When it comes down to it, we ALL have lots things that we either have done or could do, and then regret.*
 - Probably all of us who use email, have said to ourselves afterward, *"If only I had not clicked sent!"*
 - I know that all of us have felt, *"If only I hadn't said that!"*
 - And everyone has wanted a do-over, *"If only I hadn't done that!"*
- Then, when we get tired of blaming ourselves, we often shift the blame to someone else.
- And that's what happened in today's gospel reading
 - Lazarus, a good friend of Jesus, had been sick and then he died
 - Jesus arrived late, and Lazarus had already been dead for four days
 - And when Jesus got there, Mary the sister of Lazarus, cornered Jesus and said to him, *"If [only] you had been here my brother would not have died. [John 11:32]"*
 - YOU Jesus, YOU let us down! How could you!
 - And let's be honest, this story of Lazarus and Mary is not just a story from 2000 years ago, this is our story too. Probably all of us have prayed something like this to God, "Jesus, if only..."
- And now here we are on All Saints' Sunday, our gospel reading is about the death of one of Jesus' friends, and his sister saying, **IF ONLY...**
 - In the gospel story, Jesus goes to the tomb where the smell of death is hanging in the air, Jesus calls out to Lazarus, and Lazarus rises, and comes out of the tomb still wrapped like a mummy in his grave clothes
 - There was a good – even a great outcome for Lazarus and Mary, but still not so for us on this day when we remember the lives and witness of those who have died
 - But while we don't get an extension of our lives to return from death like Lazarus, we do get something more

- Because Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, if we read a little further, we will find two shocking things
 - First because Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, Jesus' enemies ironically begin to plot to put Jesus to death
 - And second, rather than have Lazarus walking around to bear witness to Jesus, those enemies also seek to find and kill Lazarus
 - What an irony! Jesus raised a dead man to life, and now BOTH of their lives are in danger
 - We don't know whatever happened to Lazarus, but we do know what happened to Jesus, don't we?
 - His enemies succeeded.
 - Jesus was arrested, he was put on trial, he was an innocent man found guilty, and he was crucified and put to death
 - His enemies, and once again like every time before death triumphed... until the surprise of Jesus' resurrection
 - And if the resurrection of Jesus the Christ was not enough in itself, Jesus promises not the extension of life that he gave to Lazarus, Jesus promises and GIVES the life that he himself has in resurrection – resurrection which broke all the rules... resurrection which crushed the power of death which until then had ruled the world... and resurrection which can give us hope
- Yet in the meantime, death still stings, and we still grieve
 - Let me tell you about a woman named Kate
 - Kate was a promising young professor of church history at Duke Divinity school, where she taught future pastors
 - And she had everything – she married her teenage sweetheart, they had a son, and she had a career on the rise
 - However there were days when she didn't feel well, but she pushed through teaching, and writing, and parenting, and life with her husband, until at the age of 35 after months of tests, she was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer.
 - Since then she has written two books while in the throes of treatments and sickness, but their titles reflect

the ongoing struggle that we, like Mary the sister of Lazarus, have with death.

- Her first book during cancer is entitled, Everything Happens for a Reason, and Other LIES that I have Loved. Yeah, everything happens for a reason is a pious lie, that gives perhaps brief comfort, but which will always leave us in a worse place than before
- And her second book is entitled, No Cure for Being Human, and Other Truths I Need to Hear. Yeah, there is no cure for being human... except on this day, All Saints Sunday, we dare to believe, we dare to hope, we sometime even dare to trust that the resurrection of Jesus Christ will make a difference not only in our lives, but also in our deaths.