

Funeral Service for Warren Minchew

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 11: 21-27

"I Am the Resurrection and the Life"

We gather today and it is not at all unlike the scene that took place in today's Holy Gospel. The scene that took place outside the place where Martha, Mary and Lazarus lived. On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been dead, in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother – and to spend time with them – probably doing some of what we are doing today. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, *"if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."* Jesus said to her, *"Your brother will rise again."* Martha answered, *"I know 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 will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"* "Yes, Lord," she told him, *"I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

We find ourselves celebrating the fact that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, who came into the world, by such a miraculous way in a manger, forever changed history, simply by being here – Emmanuel – God with us – among His people.

I have had the privilege of knowing Warren for a little over four years. Shortly after I arrived in Douglas in October of 2014 – one of our members, Colin Toogood, who is here today, regularly visited Warren, bringing him Holy Communion, wanted me to meet him. I heard about his love for working with wood, but more importantly about his love for his family. As I met Warren, he instantly recognized from my voice that I am not originally from Douglas, and he told me that he was from Massachusetts – and he asked me "do you know what that makes me?" "A damn Yankee!" We laughed – and just about every time I visited him over the years he would remind me of that. He was proud of where he came from, but he was also proud of being here in Douglas and Coffee County. I loved our visits – what a gently soul! He would also caution me to sit on his right side – because as he put it – "the other side is my bum ear." His home was filled with pictures of his loved ones – and he would tell me about Martha, Debi, Jim, Meg, Jake, Stone and his granddaughter – Maggie.

He would also tell me of his long history at St. Andrew's and of the people that he loved here. Those people would also share with me stories of his and Martha's love and caring for them, as their Junior and Senior Warden over the years. Indeed, I am sure that when he approached the Lord that Jesus said to him, *"Well done thy good and faithful servant."*

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One of the pure joys that we could give him over the years is every December we would gather on a Wednesday night and go to sing Christmas Carols to people who were not able to go out to church, and so we would invariably go to Camellia and later to Lakeside and we would sing for him. Every year Maggie would go up to the door and ring the bell and wait for her Papa to open the door and we would serenade him. This year was different though, but it didn't keep us from going to Lakeside Senior Living and see the joy of his face and the other residents as we sang. Meg and Maggie flanked Warren and it was absolutely beautiful. After we left the center – we would head to serenade Jake and Stone. That really touched all of us. After we left Warren, we went to a home on North Chester Ave. A home where Leila Morgan lives but somebody else lived there before. Gee, I think it was Warren and Martha, Jim and Debi. Ironically where Leila lives now was Warren's workshop. What a history! Paths intersect. Does God have a sense of humor or what? He is involved in all of this.

Over the years, before Warren's hearing was almost gone - Warren and I would have long talks about Jesus. He knew and loved the Lord and knew that promise that one day he would join Jesus, Martha and loved ones in heaven. He never doubted.

Warren knew that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of all the good that God has for us. One of the good things He has for us is in this passage of Scripture from John chapter 11. Most of us are familiar with this passage, in which we find Jesus about to perform one of His most famous miracles, ironically about a week before Jesus Himself would walk out of the tomb, **the raising of Lazarus from the dead**. No one but Jesus knew what was going to happen when He came, and that sets the stage for what we just heard. But what I feel is very important is that there are two things we can learn about the Savior.

First, we see in these verses that...

- Jesus lovingly allowed their grief.

When Martha came to Jesus she said that if only He had been around while Lazarus was sick, he wouldn't have died. And what was Jesus' response? Jesus said to her "*Your brother will rise again.*" He didn't say any of those things that people often say like, "*Look, it's time to move on,*" and He didn't say, "*You'll get over it – time heals all wounds.*"

Jesus also didn't say, "*Well you know, real men don't cry.*" He didn't say, "*Real spiritual people don't feel the pain of loss.*" Jesus was not one to use clichés – even those of 2 thousand years ago – instead He always spoke directly to the heart. As a matter of fact – later in this very same chapter – in verse 35 – the most powerful verse and it is just two words – "*Jesus wept.*" **Jesus weeps for them in their grief.** Both Martha and later Mary in a sense blamed Jesus for not preventing Lazarus' death. Jesus understood their grief. Holy Scripture tells us that Jesus loved Lazarus. It also says that the Savior would be "*a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.*"

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Jesus felt their pain, and experienced it with them. Jesus allowed their grief just as He allows yours and mine. But more than just "permission" to grieve, Jesus offers something that ultimately only He can give. **Jesus offered them hope**. The hope of eternal life.

Jesus said that Lazarus would rise again, and that Jesus, Himself would be the means of that resurrection. Martha thought Jesus was speaking about the final resurrection, and you know - she was partly right. She just didn't understand that Jesus was about to display the fact that He has power over death.

But I would like you to listen again to these words of Jesus - *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*

Just a few minutes later, Jesus would show that very fact in the life of Lazarus, but He wasn't just talking about bringing Lazarus back from the dead, as wonderful as that was going to be. Jesus was giving believers an incredible hope by saying that He is the door to life, both a full and abundant life on earth and when we leave earth, an even more wonderful and abundant life in heaven. When we place our faith in Jesus and what He did on the cross at Calvary, then we have the hope He offers to all who will take it.

Wonderfully, that hope is available, not just to a few, not just to someone who lives in Douglas or Coffee County or even Pearson, or maybe even Ambrose, for everyone, through knowing and accepting Jesus as Lord of your life. Jesus is compassionate and feels our grief and standing right alongside us when we hurt. Hope is not found in the good life that we try to live. Jesus says that our hope for eternity doesn't lie within us or anything we can do, but in Him alone - and what He has done. That is what He means when He says that *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."* So I want to encourage you to put your trust in the hope that only Jesus offers. It is filled with grace, peace, love and a great deal of comfort.

To Warren's family and friends - to those who worshipped alongside him and Martha at St. Andrew's, to all those residents and businesses that Warren helped find new homes - it is my prayer that Jesus Christ will touch you and give you His peace.

I would ask each one of you today to place your hope in Jesus Christ, for Him to help you in this life; place your hope in Him for life everlasting; and place your hope in Him in anticipation of the resurrection, and the hope of being reunited with Warren, Martha and all of our loved ones who have gone before.