

## From Rev. Willie J. Smith

On Sunday March 22, we enter the last 2 weeks of Lent. It is known as Passion Sunday or Passiontide, a time where enter events leading up to the death of Jesus.

The Gospels from the previous Sundays us Jesus encounters with the Woman at the well, a person whose is estranged because of her religion, gender and life followed by the story of the Man born blind, a person estranged for not being physically whole. "Did the blind man condition result from being sinful or his parent's sinfulness"? It is amazing how that time of thinking continues to exist today. Finally, Jesus encounters the death of a friend, Lazarus. The Gospel is very intimate.

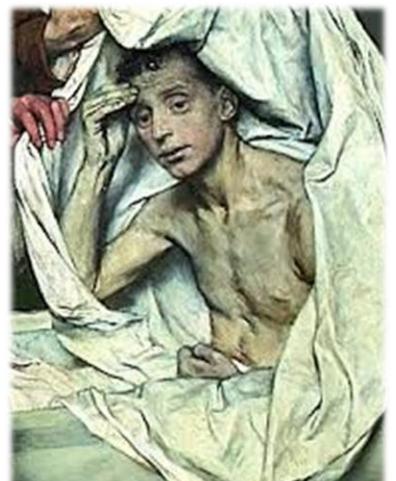
Jesus' response to Martha and Mary to the loss of their brother. Jesus breaking down to his own lost and the raising of Lazarus.

It is the last straw for those in power, so plans are being made to kill Jesus.

I would encourage you to read Chapter 11 of John's Gospel as we step into the Holiest time of the Christian calendar.

AND FINALLY THERE was Lazarus, the friend from Bethany whom he loved and whose sisters he loved. When word was brought to him that Lazarus was ill, he said, "This illness is not unto death," and when on the contrary it killed him, Jesus was still able to speak words which his followers to this day treasure as among the most precious he ever spoke: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." But when he went to Bethany and actually faced the sisters in their terrible grief, he could find for the moment no more such brave and hopeful words. "He was deeply moved in spirit," the evangelist writes, and then that shortest, bluntest verse in the entire New Testament: "Jesus wept."

If we could understand all that lay behind those tears, we would understand much about him, more maybe than it is well for us to understand; but to the degree that he was, whatever else, a human being like ourselves, we can understand at least something. It was presumably the naked fact itself that staggered him there in Bethany—death not as a distant darkness that his great faith was light enough to see him through; death not as a universal condition; but death as this death and darkness which he saw written across the swollen faces of the two women who stood there before him. Whatever Jesus may at other moments have seen as rising bright as hope beyond it, at this particular moment death was a darkness he had no heart to see beyond. Maybe it was more than that. "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?" some of the bystanders muttered in his hearing. It is hard not to believe that in the abyss of his being Jesus was asking himself the same dark question. - The Faces of Jesus from the Dead by Eduard Van Gebhardt



*The Raising of Lazarus*