

JESUS IS A HELPING FRIEND JOHN 19:38-40, HEB, 4:16
GOOD FRIDAY MAR. 25, 2016

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In midweek Lent worship we have looked at various aspects of friendship epitomized by what Jesus does for us, including interceding, understanding, compassion, serving. Most of them are various ways of helping.

A good friend knows when you need help and what kind of help you need and is willing and able to do it.

Jesus told a parable once about a man who went to a friend in the middle of the night and said another friend had come to visit him and he didn't have anything to feed him. Jesus said the first man would answer, "My family is with me in bed. I can't get up to give you anything." But, Jesus goes on, even if he is not a good enough friend to do this for him, if the other one keeps on asking he will finally get up and give him whatever he wants. His point was not that God is like this but that if even human friends would help in this situation how much more should we confidently pray to God with confidence that he will help us.

Text from Heb. 4:16 assures us that this is true because Jesus is a helping friend we can go to in prayer.

WE NEED HELP FROM FRIENDS
IT IS GOOD TO HAVE FRIENDS WHO CAN HELP
JESUS HELPS US IN THE HOUR OF DEATH

WE NEED HELP FROM FRIENDS

Baseball player Whitey Hayes once said,
"An old friend will help you move.
A good friend will help you move a dead body."

If that is true, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus must have been good friends of each other, and also good friends of Jesus even though John 19 is only place in Bible they are mentioned together.

When one asked other for help in moving a dead body, it didn't mean what one might imagine but it did take great courage and boldness.

Not only were they well aware that indicating any connection with Jesus would ruin their positions as members of Sanhedrin which was united against Jesus but crucifixion by Romans publicly identified him as worst criminal and what they did surely caught attention of both public and Roman officials.

In many ways, Joseph and Nicodemus needed a friend to help them do what they did.

Funerals have a way of bringing people together. No one can bury themselves.

This is definitely a time you need the help of friends.

There are times throughout life when we need someone to help with things we simply can't do by ourselves.

We need someone to hold other end of rope or whatever we are holding.

This is true physically, emotionally or spiritually.

We are created to be social beings.

God said it was not good for Adam to be without a helper.

When the Holy Spirit brings people to faith he also brings them into the church

because, while sin separates us from God and others, isolation, thinking that Jesus and me is all that matters is contrary to what it means to be a Christian.

When someone needs help it is important for us to help because of our common humanity.

Jesus is graciously willing to help us both because he is God and because of our common humanity.

but sometimes it may be difficult or impossible for us to do what is truly helpful.

IT IS GOOD TO HAVE FRIENDS WHO CAN HELP

Why was it Joseph and Nicodemus who buried Jesus and not Peter, James & John or Jesus' family?

They may have been the only ones uniquely made able by God to help in the way that was needed here.

As Pharisees who were members of the Sanhedrin they would have had influence and power.

Joseph apparently had right connections with government
to get permission to take the body.
As Pharisees they were probably rich,
which is confirmed by the fact that Matthew tells us
it was a tomb newly made for Joseph's own family,
fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus was with rich in his death.
When we have friends who are able to help,
when we are friends who are able to help,
it is because of the gracious gifts of God.
Sometimes we may try to help and find what we do is not helpful.
We may try to help lift a heavy burden and end up dropping it
so that it crashes down.
We may try to help someone in danger of drowning
and end up needing the life preserver for ourselves.
We may be like a scout eager to help someone cross a street
that doesn't really want to cross that street.
This can happen both literally or figuratively.
We may try to help with advice that is not good.
We may try to help someone struggling with poor behavior
and end up simply enabling them to continue instead.
We may try to help someone in danger
and make the situation more dangerous for everyone.
When we help, we need to make sure we are offering real help.
When we need help, we need to go to one
who has the wisdom and power to offer real help.
This one is Jesus who sits on the throne of power on high.
His gospel is not just self help advice
about trying harder and resolving to do better.
His worship is not just about what we have to offer him.
The story of his death is not just to arouse sympathy for him
and feeling bad about how we have failed him.
Jesus is able to offer us real help when no one else can.

JESUS HELPS US IN THE HOUR OF DEATH

¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we
may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Joseph and Nicodemus needed to help each other
to bury Jesus because moving dead bodies is hard.
They only sag and can't do anything helpful.
This is true of those spiritually dead as well. They can't help.
We are all naturally conceived and born spiritually dead.
This is why Jesus told Nicodemus earlier
we must be born again.
Like our first birth, there is nothing we do to cause it.

There is no goodness hidden somewhere inside of us
that needs to be discovered or tapped into.
There is no urge to reach out and find God
or to ask him to come and help us.
There is nothing that is able to meet God half way
or finish salvation once he gets us started.
We can't seek, choose or decide on our own
because we are dead.
But God does everything, all the lifting, for us.
God chose us before the foundation of the world.
God became man in Jesus to obey the whole law for us
and to suffer and die our death for us.
When Jesus said, "It is finished," he had finished
all that needs to be done for our salvation.
God the Holy Spirit caused this gospel to be written & preserved.
He made sure that we heard this word.
He called to us through it, and like Lazarus, who was rotting
when Jesus called him out of the grave,
& his call causes us to come to life.
He takes hold of us gently and firmly with his word & sacraments
to turn us to repentance.
He breathes faith into us and fans the flames.
He causes the fruit of right attitudes to grow in our lives
through our connection with Jesus, the vine.
He works inside of us to cause us to do the good works
which he has prepared in advance for us to do.
He guards our faith against the devil's temptation and doubt
and preserves it even when we are sleeping
and totally unaware of it.
He holds on to us & leads us through valley of the shadow of death
Finally, at time he himself chooses, he receives our spirit from us.
He gently carries us in his arms to our resting place
but unlike Joseph and Nicodemus, does not leave us in grave.
As Joseph put Jesus in his tomb, Jesus unites us in his own death
which means that we are also united in his resurrection.
He carries us all the way to his eternal rest in heaven.
We have confidence in this because of Jesus, our friend in need.

WE NEED HELP FROM FRIENDS

because of all we can't do by ourselves we need Jesus' grace.

IT IS GOOD TO HAVE FRIENDS WHO CAN HELP

Jesus who sits on the throne has wisdom & power to truly help.

JESUS HELPS US IN THE HOUR OF DEATH

He helps in what we cannot do for ourselves as no one else can
by carrying us to be with him forever.