

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Picture a battle scene from the 1800s. Two armies are facing off in a valley, ready to charge at each other. Up high on a hill overlooking the battlefield are the officers, including the commanding general. The general is sitting atop his beautifully groomed horse. He wears a spotless uniform bedecked with ribbons and medals. An ornamental hat is perched on his head, a large feather adorning it. Down below in the valley, the general's troops will soon be covered in blood and dirt, many of them wounded and dead. But the general will still be sitting, spotless, on his steed.

We're thinking about Jesus going off to war—our theme for these Lenten services. Is this what we mean, that Jesus is the general sitting high above the battlefield, untouched by the chaos below?

Okay, I should be fair. A command post, manned by a general and other officers, is needed in battle. Someone needs to sit up on the hill and direct the attack, monitor the battle, and give orders. But we should know—is Jesus sitting high above the battle, far removed from the carnage below?

We see part of the answer to this question as we read John chapter 11. A dear friend of Jesus has just died. It's Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. It appears that Jesus knew this family well and was good friends with them. When Jesus hears that Lazarus has died, what does he do? Avoid death? No, he goes right where it is.

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Jesus is the eternal, almighty Son of God. “Through him all things were made” (John 1). When humanity sinned against God, the Son of God could have responded by keeping his distance from every human being. The Son of God could have insulated himself from human corruption and sickness and death.

Instead, the Son of God did the opposite: he came close to humanity. He even took on a real human nature.

The incarnation of the Son of God—we think of it every Christmastime: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” We cover it in catechism: “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary.” It means more than we can comprehend.

Yet included in this profound truth of the incarnation is this simple fact: the Son of God, by becoming man, acquired the capability to cry.

Jesus could be, on a fully human level, “deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” (That description only scratches the surface, doesn’t it?) Jesus could feel the sobs shaking his body. He could feel the sore, hoarse throat that comes from crying. He could get the headache later after his facial muscles had been contorting. He could feel the exhaustion that seems to run through every part of a person—physical, emotional, spiritual.

“Jesus wept.”

I asked the question, is Jesus sitting high above the battle, far removed from the carnage below?

Here is our answer: no. Jesus goes down into the trenches with us. He is here among us on the battlefield. He is here with us in our grief. He is here weeping with us.

You might miss that it’s the Son of God here with us—why would he be? Why wouldn’t he stay away from this grief and death?

It’s love for us. Love brings him down onto the battlefield with us.

The fact that God becomes man and weeps with us—this truth doesn’t take the pain away. But it does speak to our hearts. Jesus is close. Jesus is here. Jesus knows.

This doesn’t make it all better, no—but it matters that Jesus weeps with us. And even the little moment of the faintest hint of relief that truth can bring wounded hearts—that little moment can be a godsend, can’t it?

Still, we crave more from Jesus. To have him weep with us is good, yes. But can he actually battle our enemy and win? Can he do something about our dying?

We can hear that question and see Jesus’ answer. Again, John chapter 11:

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

The crowd wonders why Jesus didn’t just stop Lazarus from dying in the first place. We understand their question all too well—we’ve wondered similar things when horrible things happen to people we love.

But with Jesus, don’t draw conclusions too quickly. Just because he didn’t act when people thought he should have did not mean that he was not going to act at all.

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Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Jesus does more than get down into the trenches with us. He fights. He goes into battle with death and he defeats it.

This is what we’re witnessing ^{as we watch} Jesus march to the cross. But it looks like the very opposite! It looks as if Jesus is marching to Calvary so that death can beat *him*. And to be sure, death will claim Jesus. But don’t be fooled; this hidden warrior Jesus is taking the fight to death so that he can defeat it.

There’s an obscure hymn our hymnal—the tune is not familiar to us—in which the mission of Jesus is described:

You came into our hall of death, O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air,
To drink for us the deep despair That strangled our reluctant breath.

It’s as we said before: Jesus comes down into the trenches to fight. But there’s more—we sing to God the Father about his Son, the hidden warrior:

We walled us in this house of doom, Where death had royal scope and room,
Until your servant, Prince of Peace, Broke down its walls for our release.

The poet is reminding us that Jesus came to fight death and win. He came to say, “The wages of sin—of all sinfulness and of every crime against God’s law and every failure to love and to live according to the Father’s word—all the wages of sin will be paid to me!” He suffers hell for all our sin. And he dies.

But it’s here, when the battle seems to be lost and death surely has won, that the tide turns. Really Jesus was luring death in and getting death right where he wanted it, only to then attack it and kill it.

*As he raised Laz. death
he reversed his own death*

Jesus rose from the grave. Death is dead.

Now Jesus says to each of us, "Take it—the crown of life. I won it for you. So even when you die you do not lose. No, death itself has lost, and you are victorious. Your victory is hidden here in this world, but make no mistake, it is real."

This warrior is hidden in his words saying you are forgiven, in his Supper giving you the price of your victory, in the water that connects you with his death and rising. It's hidden, but victory is here for us.

I saw a series of pictures online not long ago. The first picture seems at first glance to be a run-of-the-mill forest scene. Some shrubs, some trees, a little stream trickling by. But then the next picture is the exact same scene but with three red circles drawn over it. And when you look closely in those circles you see three soldiers with the muzzles of their rifles pointed straight at the camera.

They're camouflaged. They blend into their surroundings so that they're almost impossible to see. In reality, they're right there and lethal.

When you look at Jesus, the suffering Servant, he looks like a run-of-the-mill victim. Beaten, bruised, bloody, about to die. But we can see what Mary and Martha and Lazarus experienced that day: the Hidden Warrior is here to kill death for us. Amen.