

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

**Title: If you get all tangled up, just tango on**

**Lesson: John 11:32-44**

*<sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.*

*<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> "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." <sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*

*<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> 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." <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> 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."*

On Wednesday, we held Youth Night at the Blanchards' home. As time passed, the youth gathered one by one, and we shared a meal lovingly prepared for us. For the first time, I tried "pigs in a blanket" and was delighted by how tasty they were! After the meal, we all gathered around a table and each selected a pumpkin to decorate with a variety of creative supplies. Once we finished, we moved into a short Bible study, reflecting on Philippians 4:8 and what it teaches about a Christian attitude.

In life, we sometimes experience wins and losses—whether in personal moments or through the sports teams we root for. But the message of the night was this: as Christians, we are called to maintain a positive attitude, trusting God through all circumstances, whether we find ourselves winning or losing.

Having a positive attitude in any situation is a good message, but in reality, it's often very difficult to keep a positive attitude in our lives. Within us, we already have standards for what we consider good or not so good. So, if we had a choice between winning and losing, most of us would probably choose the winning side. Isn't that right? I even asked the kids, "If you could choose, would you want to be a winner or a loser?" Unsurprisingly, they answered, "A winner!" It's a natural response because we all prefer success and would rather avoid failure whenever possible.

**(Slide 1)** There's a scene in the film *Scent of a Woman* where Al Pacino's character, Frank Slade, a blind, retired military officer, asks a beautiful young woman, Donna, to dance with him at an upscale restaurant. Though hesitant at first—afraid she might mess up and embarrass herself—Frank reassures her, he said "There are no mistakes in the tango. If you make a mistake, get all tangled up, just tango on." Encouraged, Donna dances with Frank and they even receive applause from the people around them.

Like Donna, we often fear making mistakes or failing, and if we can, we try to avoid it. Yet life doesn't always follow our plans, and sometimes our steps get tangled. Some may experience grief from loss, others may face health challenges that disrupt daily life, and still others may encounter times of failure. These are difficult moments that we don't welcome. In the midst of these struggles, we long to escape the discomfort, to feel secure, or we might even feel abandoned by God. Sometimes, fear of these struggles keeps us from facing them altogether.

**(Slide 2)** In John 11, we find Martha and Mary going through a painful time. They had a brother, Lazarus, who was very sick. The sisters likely did all they could to help him, but despite their efforts, Lazarus was near death. Thankfully, they knew Jesus, whom they'd served and worshiped before. Jesus was their only hope, so they sent a message asking Him to come.

Jesus, too, thought highly of them, and He wasn't far away—only about two miles. He could have reached them in less than an hour. However, Jesus didn't go to them immediately; instead, He stayed where He was for two more days. His delay is hard to understand, as though He waited for Lazarus

to die. Lazarus did pass away, and his body had already been in the tomb for four days when Jesus finally arrived.

Many friends came to comfort Martha and Mary, who were grieving deeply. They must have felt tangled up in their grief, even frustrated with Jesus for not arriving sooner. When they saw Him, they cried and said, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Seeing Martha, Mary, and their friends mourning deeply, Jesus was moved and wept with them. The people thought death was the end, that nothing could be done. But they didn’t realize that Jesus, the Son of God, was present, able to turn their sorrow into joy and to use their pain and loss in ways they couldn’t yet imagine.

Friends, what kind of God do we believe in? Our God does not leave us in sorrow but enters into our grief, taking our hand and inviting us to rise and dance. The God we believe in transforms our sorrow into joy, our suffering into life.

**(Slide 3)** Everyone believed Lazarus was gone. They had seen him take his last breath, felt his cold body, and noticed the smell from his four days in the grave. Yet Jesus did not leave Lazarus in that cold tomb. He approached the tomb and called out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” Then, Lazarus, who had been dead, walked out of the grave alive.

Friends, God is the one who makes a way where there is none, and the one who creates something out of nothing, and breathes new life into death. He invites us not to fear when we’re in sorrow or despair, but to give Him room to work in our lives. Our role is to trust the Spirit, who loves us and brings us from mourning to dancing.

**(Slide 4)** Returning to the movie story, *Scent of a Woman*, Frank Slade had once been a promising military officer who served as an aide to President Lyndon Johnson. But an accident left him blind, and he was forced to retire in disgrace. He saw his life as tangled and filled with mistakes. Even though he shared some joyful moments with his caretaker, Charlie, Frank still remained in deep despair, ready to end his life.

So Frank was in his hotel room alone after parting with Charlie. Taking out his gun, he prepared to end his life—a life he felt had become hopelessly tangled and beyond redemption. Sensing that something was off, Charlie returned to stop him. When Frank demanded a reason to keep living, Charlie repeated Frank's own words: "If you make a mistake, get all tangled up, just tango on." In that moment, Frank realized his life was like a tango, and his outlook transformed completely.

When we encounter moments when life's steps get tangled, many of us focus on why the pain came, how to remove it, and what future harm it might cause. In this way, we spend a lot of time trapped in fear and despair. But in those moments, the questions we need are not "why" but "How is the Holy Spirit working in this struggle?" and "Whatever happens, how will we live through it?"

If we get tangled up in a dance, it becomes a tango. When our lives get tangled, when life doesn't go as expected, and when we face loss, illness, or failure, let's remember that this is when our dance with God begins. Amen.