

Today we are in the fifth Sunday of Lent. If you recall, our Journey through Lent began five weeks ago on Ash Wednesday. On that occasion ashes were placed on your forehead and the words were spoken “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” Those words serve as a lasting reminder that we are mortal, and unless Jesus returns before we die, death will take each and every one of us... there is nothing more sure in life than death. Although we know that, we are pretty good at compartmentalizing the prospect.

None the less, I’ll be honest, I struggle with this account of how Jesus handled Lazarus. Lazarus was one of Jesus’ best friends. And Jesus was even urged to come in time to heal him. Jesus was only a couple miles away. And what is 2 miles between friends, a 30 minute walk, a 115 calories burned?

Jesus said, “Let’s wait a couple more days.”

Did those words just come from Jesus, “Mr. your faith has healed you” Jesus...” “Mr. pick up your mat and walk” Jesus...” Indeed, they have. And Jesus is going to sit and wait while his beloved friend dies.

Does that sound like Jesus? Does that sound like your life story? Don’t worry, death is just sleep anyhow. Nothing to worry about. Of course, we know death is more than sleeping. We know sleeping bodies don’t rot. And as for Lazarus, they placed him into a tomb lifeless and stone cold dead and he laid there four days.

Jesus said “the sickness would not lead to death”, but it did and his body reeked because of it. And after all that had happened, Jesus finally speaks. “Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Martha said, “Lord, I believe... and I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Martha's words are comforting. I love those words. And I cling to that truth like Martha did. But they do not change the grief of the situation, the fact that Lazarus died.

So perhaps, the resurrection of the dead, was not all of what Jesus meant to get across to Mary. I thought about General William Wallace's words. He said, "Every man dies, not every man really lives."

Yes, Jesus understood death did not separate Lazarus from God. But he also wants us to understand something too; that we could be a living breathing human being and already be dead in a tomb. It is kind of ironic that our culture is infatuated with zombies and the Walking Dead. Maybe it is a little sick that we have embraced the very thing we have become.

I've known a lot of people that have died. Time had entrapped them in tombs of defeat. Yes they had heart beats, they had a pulse, Science would say they are very much alive, but spiritually they were dead as a door nail.

I had a friend on facebook recently fill out one of those boredom surveys. One of the questions was: if you could meet anyone who would it be. He said, God, to know if he exists. First, allow me to assert, God is not hidden from anyone. He has revealed himself very clearly through Jesus Christ. But as Lazarus told the rich man, if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead. That is how dead some living among us have become.

What say you? Are you alive? I know that sounds like a silly question. But "Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

Jesus had the power to stop death in its tracks. But he didn't. Why? It is because God has a different perspective on death than we do. And besides, Jesus said, "For your sake, I'm glad I waited. I waited so that you may believe."

For you and I even the thought of death brings fear and uncertainty and that makes sense; death takes even the greatest life and turns it into a tragedy. But John Chapter 11 shows us Jesus can take a tragedy and turn it into a triumph.

*"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live."* On Good Friday Jesus again did not stop death, not even for himself. But on Easter Morning Jesus rose from the grave. And more than that, He rose himself from the grave.

Of course we will get to that in a couple of weeks, but here, in John 11, everyone knew the raising of Lazarus was a great and profound miracle. Who is this man that can call the dead to life? The message of Jesus in John Chapter 11 is that God has come to town and He proved He can roll away your stone. That He, only He, is able to lift you out of your deadness, and He, only he, can make you alive. And you don't have to wait until you die. He can do it now.

The Apostle Paul said, "Don't you know. All those who are Baptized have been baptized into Christ's death."

What Paul wants you to know is that your entry into the church, your entry into eternal life, was made possible through Christ's death, and just as Christ now lives... so it is also with you.

In your Baptism Jesus called you from sin and death and darkness, to live a new life. And each and every day Jesus calls individuals out of tombs of depression, tombs of addiction, tombs of the past, tombs of defeat, tombs of isolation... Whatever the tomb, hear Christ calling you to come out.

Hear Jesus reminding you He has won life for you through his death on the cross. And, God does not want to be alone in knowing this any longer. He wants you to know it. He wants you to experience it and believe it, and he want you to dare to live the life he now gives to you in Him. Jesus saying, “Come out”.

What are the tombs Jesus is calling you to come out of? Because even this morning, Jesus is calling you... “Come out.” Come out of death into life. I’m glad God is not squeamish when it comes to dealing with death.

Can these dry bones walk? Lord you know. God wants you to see in these texts that there is someone who can rescue you from the power of death. John 11 was recorded to teach us perhaps the most profound idea in all the Bible. Can these dead bones walk, Mary and Martha? The answer is yes. Yes they can but how? Through Jesus Christ they can walk.

Jesus conquered death... In fact, He conquered death for you. For this reason, Jesus can take your hand and guide you through the darkest valley of your life, but more than that, he can also guide you even though the valley of death itself.

Our stories are all different, yet they will all end in the same way... with a stone rolled over a grave. But to this end, Jesus speaks to the heart of the matter. Death has no more dominion over us. Experience this hope. Live in this hope. God has the power to bring life even into a grave yard.

In the grace of God, which surpasses all understanding trust your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Amen.