

Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

The 5th Sunday in Lent

Deacon Dan's Homily

Who is Jesus? A friend, a nonbeliever, or your adult son or daughter asks you later this evening/this afternoon, "who is Jesus?" What will you say? Who do you say that he is?

Over these last three weekends, all in the Gospel of John, we've heard Jesus say to the woman at the well, "I will give you living water"; to the man born blind, "I am the light of the world"; and today, to Martha he says, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live."



We began this morning hearing from the Prophet Ezekiel the promise of God, "I am going to open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, my people, and bring you back to the land of Israel." I will make you come out of your graves...whatever grave you might be in.

- Are you in a grave of depression?
- Are you in a grave of isolation?
- Are you in a grave of fear?
- Are you in a grave of addiction?
- Are you in a grave of regret?

He promises, I will make you come out of that grave; that grave which buries you, holds you down, which suffocates you; that grave of sin which causes you death of the soul. And, why? Why would God do this?

Because he loves us so much, so much that he sent his only Son to come to us, to be with us, to accompany us and to invite us to be grafted onto him to live, and not just live, but to live to our fullest potential; to be the most of ourselves, in him.

Today's story of resurrection is the third time our Lord is recorded to have raised someone from the dead. First, it was the daughter of Jairus, who lay dead in her bed inside the house; then, it was the son of the widow, already being carried outside the city walls, and today, the raising of Lazarus, four days in the tomb.

St. Augustine wrote about this Gospel story saying that the Evangelist had more in mind when he described these events that merely good deeds done by our Lord, but, rather there must be a deeper meaning, speaking something more to us about death and life; about the flesh and the spirit; about sin and redemption.

He likens the young girl, the daughter, of the synagogue official, laying dead inside, to the kind of sin that has not yet developed into action. It lies within us in the form of anger, resentment, or a grudge, slowly beginning to erode our soul and acting like a backpack of rocks building up which weight us down. It is a spiritual death poisoning us on the inside, not expressed in words or actions. Jesus wants to come and take our hand and lift us out of our deathbed.

Second, the widow from Nain's son, being carried out the city gate is the form of more serious sin. This sin's effect goes out beyond us and affects others around us through our gestures, our acts and our words. Perhaps it is the expressed words that cut someone down; the actions of racism that are intended to suppress and limit another person's ability to achieve their own potential. Jesus wants to come to us, call us into life again, and have us sit up out of our death and return us to our loved ones.

And, finally, the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus translated means "God helps" ...us. In a way we are all Lazarus. And this story takes place in Bethany, just a short distance from Jerusalem. Bethany translated means "The House of the Afflicted." We all live in a house that is afflicted to some degree, don't we?

We are told was in the tomb long enough that Martha said, " "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days."

Augustine writes, Lazarus represents habitual sin. A grievous kind of death it is, and is distinguished as a habit of [wickedness](#). For it is one thing to fall into [sin](#), another to form the [habit](#) of sinning. He who falls into [sin](#), and straightway submits to correction, will be speedily restored to life; for he is not yet entangled in the habit, he is not yet laid in the tomb. But he who has become habituated to [sin](#), is buried, and has it properly said of him, he stinks; for his character, like some horrible smell, begins to be of the worst repute. Such are all who are habituated to crime, abandoned in morals.

Do you know someone who is caught in this state of spiritual death that they have come to believe that there is no hope, no chance of redemption, of becoming whole again; that they are beyond forgiveness?

Jesus goes into this darkness, seeking to bring that person back from death. Lazarus, already buried, tied up and unable to help himself, the stone, rolled across the front of the tomb has closed him off from the living.

You think this is only a story from 2,000 years ago? This describes countless men and women and young people who will be treated by paramedics and emergency room medical teams today. This describes the person on the other end of the line talking to suicide prevention counselors here in El Dorado County. This describes many of the folks who are begging for help on our street corners and will show up at the Upper Room this evening for a meal. For all of us, all of us who are in any one of these three types of spiritual death, Jesus groans at our deep disfunction.

Jesus weeps because we are not yet fully alive, and he wants us to be alive. He says, “Take away the stone”, the finality of death, of sin. And, he says, “Lazarus come out!”

Imagine, Jesus calling us by name...calling you forth by name: Cristy, Kelly, Scott, Dan come out, come to me.

1ST READING Ez 37:12-14

Therefore, prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Look! I am going to open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, my people, and bring you back to the land of Israel.^d

13You shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and make you come up out of them, my people!

14I will put my spirit in you that you may come to life, and I will settle you in your land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. I have spoken; I will do it—oracle of the LORD.^e

Psalms 130: 1-8

Out of the depths^{*} I call to you, LORD;

2Lord, hear my cry!

May your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.^a

3If you, LORD, keep account of sins,
Lord, who can stand?^b

4But with you is forgiveness
and so you are revered.^{*}

5I wait for the LORD,
my soul waits
and I hope for his word.^c
6My soul looks for the Lord
more than sentinels for daybreak.^d
More than sentinels for daybreak,
7let Israel hope in the LORD,
For with the LORD is mercy,
with him is plenteous redemption,^e
8And he will redeem Israel
from all its sins.^f

2ND READING Romans 8: 8-11

...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.^f
9But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.^g
10But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness.^h
11If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.

GOSPEL John 11: 1-45

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany,^a the village of Mary and her sister Martha.
2Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill.
3So the sisters sent word to him, saying, "Master, the one you love is ill."
4When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death,^{*} but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."^b
5Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.
6So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was.
7Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."
8The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?"^c
9Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day,^d he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.^e
10But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."^{*}
11He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him."
12So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved."
13But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep.^f
14So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died.

15And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him.”
16So Thomas, called Didymus,^{*} said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go to die with him.”^g
17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.
18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles^{*} away.
19And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.^h
20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home.
21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”ⁱ
22[But] even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.”
23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise.”
24Martha said to him, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.”ⁱ
25Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live,^k
26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”
27^{*} ^l She said to him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”
28When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, “The teacher is here and is asking for you.”
29As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him.
30For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him.
31So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there.
32When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”
33When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed^{*} and deeply troubled,
34and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Sir, come and see.”
35And Jesus wept.^m
36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.”
37But some of them said, “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?”
38So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it.
39Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.”
40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”
41So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father,^{*} I thank you for hearing me.
42I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.”ⁿ
43And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice,^{*} “Lazarus, come out!”
44The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.”
45Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.^o