

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Scripture:

John 11:1-45 New International Version (NIV)

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” **4** When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6** So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. **10** It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” **13** Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, **15** and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. **18** Now Bethany was less than two miles^[b] from Jerusalem, **19** and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. **20** When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. **22** But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; **26** and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” **29** When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. **30** Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. **31** When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 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.”

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?"

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

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."

The Plot to Kill Jesus

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Sermon:

Looking Anew

I have found myself thinking about the new world we all find ourselves in – certainly not the new world I've longed for and hoped ministry was about creating. But here we are trying our best to keep safe and hoping others are keeping safe too.

I have found myself pondering the stories from John's Gospel we have been looking at during this Lenten season, knowing their focus has been on seeing. We began with Nicodemus who sees something, but he's just not certain because this "born from above" thing doesn't fit any framework for his understanding of how God works. I don't think he quits struggling but he can't fully embrace what Jesus has offered him. Then there's the woman at the well. Is it her vulnerability that makes her open to Jesus offer of living water? Good News which she shares with her community. In the story of healing the man born blind I hear other kinds of blindness – certainly blindness of witnesses around him to the ways God can work in the world - even on the Sabbath. But the man not only gains sight, but that deeper seeing to know that Jesus must be from God.

We know we don't all come to see or believe in the same way. I do believe the stories John includes are intended to help us see God's love manifest in the world.

Today's story is a hard one – there have been threats against Jesus so traveling into the area near Jerusalem is risky – Bethany, where Mary and Martha live is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and they have sent Jesus a message that their brother, Lazarus is ill. I could understand that Jesus is not too worried about his friend because it is likely that Lazarus is near Jesus in age – younger, healthier and will just recover. But Lazarus dies – is even dead four days before Jesus arrives. So much of this story is like a precursor to what will be Jesus own story. And Jesus has warned his disciples that he will die but be raised on the third day. But his followers, like many of us, don't want to hear that part of the story. Death means an end – not something we want to face. As the story goes - first Martha then Mary say to Jesus "if only you

had been here our brother would not have died”. If only – we don’t know any details. How many times do we say – or think If only – If I had done something differently or been more prepared? But, in spite of ourselves, the thing we dreaded happened. We seem to think we can be in charge of the inevitable. Jesus feels this loss too – he weeps.

But then he invites those who are present with him at Lazarus’ tomb to act – to roll the stone away. And he calls Lazarus out. Lazarus then needs to be unbound from the bands that restrict him. We really don’t know more of Lazarus’ story. He doesn’t appear in any other part of Jesus’ story. We don’t hear of him as a disciple, but he is alive to those who know and love him. They see their beloved restored to them and believe in Jesus. But there are other people there – people who see what Jesus does and find that to be a threat. They fear that the Romans will destroy their holy place if they become aware of what Jesus is doing – causing people to believe in him. Can it be that we are invited – like those at Lazarus’ tomb – to unbind those around us who are afraid? Jesus wants us to see that death is not the enemy, but to free us to “see that the world is bathed in light”. The stone that needs to be rolled away is our fear of death. It is part of the larger mystery called life and does not have the last word.

This is our preparation for Easter.