

Lent 5
John 11:1-45
March 26, 2023

This morning's gospel took me back to my third grade Sunday school class at St. Mark's Methodist Church. The class all went to the River Theater in Oildale California to see the 1927 silent Cecil B DeMille classic King of Kings. I can still see the actor playing Lazarus rising from his crypt, wrapped up like a mummy and his sister Mary unwinding the strips of cloth around his face. Dramatic to my eight year old mind, you bet and I never doubted because I saw this miracle with my own eyes.

This powerful story of the raising of Lazarus serves as a reminder of Jesus' power over death and his promise of eternal life to those who believe in him.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. What a lovely family trio this is. Mary was the sister who loved to listen to Jesus. Martha was the sister who loved to serve others. Lazarus was the brother who was ill. No family is consistently perfect, are we?

Each of us, from the smallest household to the largest church, has people who like to listen, people who like to serve, and people who are sick. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They keep showing up in the New Testament, and they keep showing up in church.

In this church, right now we are looking for Martha's and Mary's who are called to listen and serve as visitors or Eucharistic Ministers, serving this community, our assisted living

community and our memory care community see me, Angie or Karen if you are feeling this call.

We heard in this morning's Gospel that Jesus received word that his dear friend Lazarus, was gravely ill and despite the urgency of the situation, Jesus waited two days before he set out for the town of Bethany, where Lazarus lived. When he arrived, Lazarus had already been dead and buried for four days.

This gospel aims to show that Jesus did things, not because he was pressed to do them, but because he chose to do them in his own good time. It is a warning to us. So often we would like Jesus to do things in our timeframe; but we must leave him to do them in his own time.

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Yes, she repeats the same words as her sister Martha did. For all their sharp differences, Mary and Martha are actually quite similar. They love Jesus, but they believe that Jesus really came to fulfill their own, personal, and immediate desires. "If only God had been here, I would not have gone through all this pain." If this is what we say, then we are wrong.

Jesus did not come to take away our pain. Jesus came so that we could live through pain to resurrection.

Upon seeing Lazarus's, grieving sisters, Martha and Mary, Jesus was deeply moved and wept with them.

Jesus wept. This verse, John 11.35, is the answer to many trivia contests, because it is the shortest verse in the entire Bible! It may be one of the most powerful, too. Jesus, the Son of God, knows sorrow and weeping. Jesus can be moved, and greatly disturbed. To love means to be able to be moved. Jesus loved Lazarus, his friend; and he loved Mary and Martha and their friends. Jesus is moved by their sorrow and pain.

Jesus then commanded that the stone covering the tomb be taken away, then in a loud voice he said, "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Then Jesus said, "Unbind him, and let him go!" I like these words more than I like "Lazarus, come out."

Maybe you know people who are yearning to live resurrected lives but may still be tangled up in old burial clothes. They may be bound up in old stories, old arguments, old resentments, and an inability to forgive.

The season of lent is a perfect time for unbinding. We all have stories, positive or negative and we act consistently with them. What is your story, that is in need of resurrection? I'm turning eighty this year, what might be my story about age? When Karen asked us to write reflections for the Lenten booklet it was terrifying for some but ultimately empowering. If your story was, I can't reflect on scripture, perhaps you now have a more empowering story.

Here is where we need community. We need others. Often, it is the task of Christian community to complete the action of Resurrection. Jesus has called forth new life: Lazarus come out!"

But he still has burial clothes on than need to be unbound.

"Unbind him, and let him go." Those should be the words which are our orders every day, every new day. When you find yourself or someone yearning for new life: your friend, your wife, your husband, your companion, even the stranger, help them to unbind.

As we reflect on the raising of Lazarus, let us remember that no matter how hopeless the situation may seem Jesus has the power to bring new life, and hope where there was once only despair, let us trust in his love, and his promise of eternal life, and seek to live our lives in service to him.

May we also be inspired by the faith of Martha and Mary, who believed in Jesus, even when all seemed lost, and may we join with them in proclaiming that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and that all who believe in him will never die, but will live forever Amen.