

A Lent 5 2017 John 11:1-45

Today we arrive at the **last of a 4 part sermon series** from the Gospel of John.

We have met the Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to see Jesus at night, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind and today Jesus raises Lazarus.

They all have functioned like living parables which demonstrate Jesus' power and glory and the extent of his compassion.

In each story, Jesus, widens the circle of God's love, and we see ourselves included in the Kingdom of God.

I had a professor who said **they were like mini resurrection stories because each one gave some kind on new life.**

So now we have the raising of Lazarus.

It is another long one and again you get to sit.

- Lazarus was a friend to Jesus and he was brother to Mary and Martha.
- Their family lived in Bethany, which was a small town on the Mount of Olives, about 15 minutes from Jerusalem.
- Jesus stayed at their home, whenever he visited Jerusalem, so it was natural for the sisters to seek Jesus' help.
- Martha was the first person to call Jesus ***“the son of God, the Messiah.”***
- This miracle serves as a pivotal moment in the gospel of John.

- Everything changes for Jesus after his raising Lazarus. Up to this point Jesus is preaching and teaching to the crowds.
- Afterward, Jesus spends his time with his disciples and journeys to his death.
- This is the event that angered the authorities so much that they were determined to arrest Jesus and put him to death.
- A couple of other things you can notice while I read is that Lazarus was ultimately in the grave for 4 days. There was a belief that the spirit hung around the body for 3 days and so 4 days in the grave meant that Lazarus was dead, really dead.
- Finally notice that Jesus wept. (Shortest verse in the Bible: John 11:35. Why do you suppose he wept? Was it because of his grief? His sadness that others grieved? Or was it in frustration at the lack of faith he found at the tomb? What do you think?)

Well that will give you a few things to think about when you hear now the story of the raising of Lazarus.

***John 11:1-45 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)  
The Death of Lazarus***

***Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus,<sup>[a]</sup> “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it***

*is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus<sup>[b]</sup> was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

*Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin,<sup>[c]</sup> said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*

#### *Jesus the Resurrection and the Life*

*When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus<sup>[d]</sup> had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles<sup>[e]</sup> away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus,*

*"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.<sup>[f]</sup> Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,<sup>[g]</sup> the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

#### *Jesus Weeps*

*When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 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." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 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 to Life*

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”*

### *The Plot to Kill Jesus*

*Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*

Even though this story occurs before Jesus’ death and resurrection, it was no doubt a resurrection moment for Mary and Martha. They had their brother, Lazarus back.

Yes, Lazarus would eventually die again but for now, Mary and Martha celebrated his return to life and to his place in their lives.

(We don’t know if Lazarus was happy or not. Had he experienced the glory of heaven? Did he find it hard to return to his life on earth? We don’t know but...) The next time Lazarus appears in scripture is in the next chapter of John. A dinner was given in Jesus honor. Martha served and Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Jesus.

So, for Lazarus, resurrection wasn’t just being called out of the grave but he was also given life abundant in this life, right there, celebrating a meal with Jesus and his family and friends. That was a resurrection moment for Lazarus.

A week ago Friday, I went to visit Marion Madsen who is now on Hospice. Marion was in bed; we had prayers; she smiled at me and seemed to connect with the Lord’s Prayer. I gave her a blessing. Sunday I returned and was met at the door of her care center by a well-meaning resident, who told me that Marion had died. I was sad. I had hoped to have more time with her. I didn’t hear from the family on Sunday afternoon or on Monday and so on Tuesday, I called her son and left a voice mail, asking when we could get together.

A little while later, into my office walked Gary, Marion’s son and his wife Linda, all smiles. While visiting their mother, walking her around the VNA, they had heard that someone had misunderstood and had told the “woman pastor” that Marion had died. But you see she was still very much alive!

**For me it was a resurrection moment.** When I next saw Marion she was sitting up and smiling. She was surrounded by family and friends and there was so much love in the room.

Extra time with a loved one can be such a joy.

We forget that time is always limited, for us and for those we care about and love. **Knowing that makes what time we have all the more precious.**

**It is often said, life is short, enjoy it.** And that's a good thing to remember **if** we are not talking about some self-centered hedonism. God has given us today, this moment, this opportunity, to experience and share love with others. There is no time for grudges, or selfishness, or anger or hate. Knowing that there is no guarantee about tomorrow but also knowing that there is a promise of the future glory of resurrection with Christ, **today can be a blessing, a resurrection moment.**

**The raising of Lazarus, prepare his disciples and followers for what was yet to come.** He also wanted to give them the sweetness of an experience of the resurrected life. You see The resurrection changes not only our future but our nows, the moments we have today, right here.

“Jesus says to Martha, ***“I am the resurrection AND the life.”*** And later in 17:3, ***“And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*** The raising of Lazarus is not justification but salvation. Not proof but promise. Not evidence but

experience. Resurrection is not something you simply believe or must confess. Resurrection isn't a theology that can be fully comprehended. No, resurrection is to be experienced. Because when you experience resurrection, you start to feel resurrected.” (Caroline Lewis, Resurrection Now, Working Preacher on line, March 26, 2017)

We are two weeks away from Easter. There are lots of things you might want to do to prepare: order the ham, buy the candy, get a new dress or a shirt and tie, polish your shoes.

But more than anything this is what I want you to do, **notice the resurrection moments in your life**. No matter what is going on, no matter what is keeping you up at night, God will bless you with experiences and relationships that will lead you to know the resurrection when you see it.

This is the good news of the raising of LAZARUS.  
This is the good news of the gospel. Amen