

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, March 29

Text: John 11:1-44

“The Raising of Lazarus”

Children's Sermon – Show a box of Tissues, discuss the uses, and explain how Jesus wept when his friend died.

All of our lessons assigned to this week were about hope and resurrection. Life after death. Where have you seen signs of hope this week? We will do this like *Blues Clues*. I will ask a question and pause. Then you can say or write your signs of hope in your handy dandy notebook. Where have you seen signs of hope this week?

I see the lilies bursting through the ground in our yard. I saw our neighbor put the Christmas lights up on the bushes between our houses. Marcella loves it. I notice that we do two loads of dishes a day. That means we are eating lots of meals together at home. But, thank you to all the workers at restaurants who help satisfy our cravings, like at Dairy Queen last night.

I felt hope this week during and after I hosted my first Zoom Bible Study on Wednesday at 10 AM. It felt so good to gather, even if it was online. Take the time this week to start a hope journal and write down signs of hope, what you miss, and what you hope for in the future. Oh, I also woke up one morning and wrote a goal list for the day. I believe I accomplished nearly everything I wrote down.

It is often said, we don't read the Bible, but the Bible reads us.

The context we are living in informs how we read the scriptures. The Covid-19 outbreak is dominating our lives. We read the Bible through this lens today. The news seems to get scarier by the minute, especially hearing about how unprepared we were for this. But in the midst of this, we are longing to hear a word of hope to reorient us.

Today we get that word in the raising of Lazarus story. Words are powerful. They can raise us up or tear us down. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that our words may give grace to those who hear.” We should all operate this way as

Christians. We are to use our words to build one another up. For example, I have been practicing saying “thank you” to everyone who is working in jobs deemed as essential. They are out there risking their lives for us. Thank You!

And thank you for your encouraging words this week. They keep me straining ahead to be the church in a new context. I feel lifted up by all of you. Thank you!

John 11:1 starts off, “Now a certain man was ill.” Speaking of the Bible reading us. People are ill. I am drawn in to this story. I want to hear more.

The man had a name... Lazarus. He had two sisters. Mary and Martha. These are the same sisters mentioned in Luke 10:38-42. Remember, Mary sat at the feet of Jesus listening to him teach while Martha did all the work of hospitality and complained to Jesus about her sister. Jesus was friends with this family.

The sisters sent a desperate message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” The sisters believed Jesus could do something for their brother who had an unknown illness. The word for love here is Philo. It is where we get the word Philadelphia... the city of brotherly love. Jesus has friendship love for Lazarus and his sisters. Notice we sang “What a friend we have in Jesus” at the beginning of worship. Good job, Kim and Berdie.

Jesus will go to be with this family in crisis, but he delays two days. In the meantime, Lazarus dies. This is jarring that Jesus waited. It is not like Jesus to delay. But typical to John’s Gospel, Jesus already knows what he will do with the situation. John has what scholars call a High Christology. Jesus is all knowing in John’s Gospel. Whereas in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), Jesus is learning his identity. Plus, God’s timing isn’t always our timing. Jesus intends to use Lazarus’ death to reveal God’s powerful presence in Jesus and the future promise of resurrection. The purpose of all the signs in John’s Gospel is so people believe in Jesus as God’s Son.

When Jesus arrives, Lazarus has already been dead for 4 days. In the Jewish Culture, they believed a person’s soul left the body after 3

days. Friends were gathering to mourn with Mary and Martha. They would hold Shiva, just sit with the grieve family. When Martha heard Jesus had come, she went out to meet him. She complained to Jesus. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

How many of you can relate? Complaining to God, wondering if God is present. This a real human response to grief. And yet Martha still believed Jesus could do something for her brother. She had faith in Jesus. “Even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of God.” Jesus said, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha says, “I know, on the last day.” But Jesus responds, “I am the resurrection and life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” Simply knowing Jesus and believing in him promises us eternal life.” And in John’s Gospel, eternal life isn’t just after we die, but is right now when you come to know Jesus.

After this exchange, Martha goes home and sends Mary to see Jesus. They must have rehearsed their lines, because Mary comes out, and in Mary’ style, kneels at Jesus’ feet. She says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus then saw her weeping, and the Jews who surrounded her weeping. Jesus was deeply moved and greatly disturbed in his spirit. Then he began to weep. The Word that became flesh weeps with us humans.

How does Jesus respond to grief? He enters it. He knows human pain He has compassion for us and weeps with us.

My mom had a crisis of faith when I was 18 and fell into a deep depression after my brother and I left home for college. She said, her whole life was raising us kids. Then all of a sudden, her purpose in life left. She told me after the fact that there was a long period where she was mad at God. She even took the picture of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemene off her wall in her bedroom. At some point, she told me she visited ELCA Pastor John Henning in his office. He told her, “God hasn’t abandoned you in your grief. God weeps with you.” These four words raised my mom up.

After Jesus wept, he went to the tomb. He enlisted the people to roll the stone away. And they did. Jesus prayed to his Father in Heaven

for help. Then Jesus cried out, “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus came out, looking like mummy. Notice, a Word from Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus’ Word is powerful and can raise us too from whatever binds us. Jesus then enlisted the people again, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

To me, this is the role of church. To help roll the stone away so people can hear God’s word. Our lives should be an invitation to faith rather than a stumbling block. And to unbind someone is to restore them to community.

What stones need to be rolled away for you to hear Jesus voice? Peder Eide says in the song, “Roll the Stone Away” about Lazarus, “if you’re gonna rise, you gotta hear his voice.” Or what is binding you or holding you hostage? Is it worries or fears. Jesus’ Word has the power free us from our fears. The Bible says perfect love casts out fear. Today, we are called out of our tombs to live again. Even in the midst of quarantine, we can experience abundant life. And when we are given the all clear, we will forever be changed by this experience.

Look for signs of hope and abundant life this week. They are there.

Amen.