

Moderator Richard Bott

Sermon for Online Worship, March 29, 2020

Fifth Sunday in Lent

(Text for a sermon preached online on Tuesday, March 24, 2020.)

*A reflection on John 11:1-45.*

A powerful story of life and death, and life anew.

From the stories in different parts of the scriptures, it's pretty clear to me that Mary, Martha and Lazarus were important people in Jesus' life. We have the story of Mary, a disciple who sat at Jesus' feet, learning from him, at another time anointing him with perfume; Martha, one of the disciples who embodied loving one's neighbour with her service... and Lazarus, who, this story tells of Jesus bringing back from the dead!

What's speaking to me in this scripture – at this time – are the various ways that people responded to Jesus, and his response to them.

If we had read the verses that came before 17, we would have found out that Jesus had been notified that Lazarus was ill a number of days before Lazarus died. Jesus waited two days after hearing the news, before heading to Bethany.

Remember, Jesus was well known as a healer by that time, especially by his disciples. So it makes a lot of sense that, when Martha heard that Jesus was arriving – I'm guessing much later than she expected – I hear hurt and anger in her voice. She knew that Jesus loved her brother. She knew that if Jesus had been there, he would have healed Lazarus. And she knew that her brother was dead.

So she who was the "go getter", the person who needed to take action, was right there – to tell him, Jesus, how she felt. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

In fact, when Martha brought Mary to Jesus, because Jesus wanted a moment with her, her cry was the same, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus could hear the sadness. Jesus could hear the anger. Jesus could see it on the faces of all of those folks who had come to grieve with the sisters... and Jesus wept, too. Jesus understood their pain, felt his own, and cried.

Mixed in with those tears, we hear Martha's powerful statement of faith, "Yes, Lord, I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

In the midst of all of this grief, expressed in sadness and in anger, Jesus turns to the tomb and he calls on God – and calls Lazarus out.

He calls Lazarus out from being in the tomb into the air; from being wrapped in grave-cloth, to being unbound; from death to life.

In the midst of grief, Jesus brought the most amazing, the most unimaginable, the most impossible, time of celebration.

As we live into this time of Covid-19, as we watch what is happening in the world – in places where the medical systems have been overwhelmed, and in the places that have responded to the best of their ability, and in the places that are still waiting for their first peak – we are seeing confusion, and chaos, and grief.

I find it deeply comforting that our God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, understands our fear, understands our anger, understands our sadness and our grief – and is with us in those feeling and in this time.

I find it deeply comforting that I can look into the world and see the Holy Spirit moving – in the ways that communities are coming together, in the willingness of medical professionals – and others - who were retired coming back into service for the community; in the offers from neighbours, who don't know each other, working to making sure that those around have what is needed; in choices that are being made to LIVE life in a time when everything is uncertain, and our emotions are all over the place.

In this story, even as he wept, Jesus called Lazarus from death to life, from grave-cloth to freedom, from the tomb to open air...

...what might he, even as he weeps, be calling us out of – be calling us in to?

Amen, and amen.