

Fifth Sunday in Lent-March 26, 2023

11.1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4But 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." 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9Jesus 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. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24Martha said to him, "I know that he

will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” 28When 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.” 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31The 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. 32When 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.”

33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus 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.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I 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.” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The 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.”

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

INTRODUCTION- There is no where God's love doesn't go. Jesus goes to the grave of his dear friend, knowing this will lead to going to his own grave. There in Bethany, Jesus is both resurrection and life.

SERMON

Mourners at Lazarus' grave knew by heart Ezekiel's story about dry bones. A treasured story bears witness that when their world fell to rack and ruin, God was far from done.

Lazarus' family and the company of mourners could hardly be blamed for not expecting a similar story to play out in the grave yard outside Bethany.

Nevertheless.. as Lazarus' family and his village huddle around the tomb, God's Spirit and speech course through Jesus' body and voice. Lazarus' lifeless limbs knit together, flesh revivifies, air re-inflates the lungs, and Lazarus stumbles out of the grave still swaddled and as baffled as everyone in attendance.

John labels Lazarus coming back to life as a sign—a whopper of a sign to be sure. What does Lazarus return to the land of the living point to?

In the short run, the sign points to the cross. Religious authorities want Lazarus chucked back into the grave he came from and Jesus' resurrection antics prove to be the last straw. The sign points beyond the cross toward God's stubborn refusal that Jesus' execution ushers in the end.

The resurrection sign points to abundant life...just as Jesus says he IS resurrection AND life.

Jesus commands Lazarus to be released from his burial fetters. And where does Lazarus go? The preacher Joy J. Moore offers a delightful little joke that Lazarus doesn't embrace new life as an opportunity to earn more money or improve his golf game. New life for Lazarus means abundant life. Dr. Moore and her colleague Karoline Lewis urge Working Preachers to read ahead...and when we do, we arrive at Martha, Mary and Lazarus' home.

It is there that Lazarus communes in deep friendship with Jesus, reclining at table, leaning into him. Here is our glimpse of resurrected life—deep and abiding friendship with Jesus.

Alas- Lazarus would die again. So would his sisters. So would all who witnessed Lazarus raising from the dead. Jesus would die too. We will die. Our churches will eventually die. Nonetheless the spirituals defiantly proclaim, "But Sunday's a comin'"

God who reveals to Ezekiel the Divine vision of raising up a nation from a boneyard refuses to quit. God embodied in Jesus raises up Lazarus to a resurrected life of deep abiding friendship. God who summons Jesus, the beloved, to resurrected life, intends the same for us and for creation itself.