

Lent 5A
John 11:1-45

After several weeks of long Gospel readings from John,
We've arrived at the pinnacle of miracles,
Fittingly, right before Palm Sunday next week and our entry
into Holy Week following.

The story of Lazarus being raised from the dead
Is both a culmination of Jesus' acts we have been reading
throughout Lent in John's Gospel,
And a launching point into Jesus' passion and death.

Lazarus is not the first person to be raised by Jesus.
Jesus had brought both Jairus' daughter and a widow's son back to life,
But there's a significant difference in those miracles,
Because though both had been saved from the snares of
death. . .

Neither had been dead for very long.

Neither had even left their deathbed.

Neither had been wrapped in burial clothes
and actually buried.

In Lazarus' story, however,
The point is that he is good and dead.

Four- days dead.

Bound- in- burial -cloth dead.

Stench- in- the- tomb dead.

Lazarus is fully,

finally,

Unequivocally dead.

When Jesus arrives at Bethany,
The stone had already been rolled into place,
sealing out any trace of light from Lazarus' tomb,
And any trace of hope from the hearts of those
who had longed for a different ending for him.
It's after the reality of death has been accepted,
Resigned to. . .
THEN, Jesus arrives.

My seminary pastor the Reverend Dr. John Lergen proclaimed years ago
in a sermon,

That "God is not in the business of granting wishes.
God is in the business of raising the dead."

Jesus tells us why he waits to go to Bethany,
Even after the urgent messages from Mary and Martha that their
brother was ill,
Even after he arrives at the entrance to the city,
He stays there for a bit before going to the tomb.

Jesus waits,
Because it is in death that God's glory is revealed most powerfully.
It is in the good and dead,
The driest of bones,
That God chooses to come and breathe life.
Raising the dead is something only God in Christ can do.
Raising the dead is God's glory at its best!

God's business of raising the dead reveals the reality that there are dead ones who need raising.

Not sick ones,

Not almost-dead ones.

But truly, really dead ones.

Dry-bones dead ones.

The kind of dead ones who are stuck in dark tombs of sin that won't let us out-

Stuck in habits that hurt ourselves and others,

Selfishness,

Pain and despair,

Jealousy and greed,

Fear and doubt.

The kind of dead ones who are wrapped tightly in burial clothes that keep us bound—

Bound to the opinions of others,

Bound to worries and uncertainties,

Bound to harsh judgments and negative thoughts

Bound to sizing up others, seeing them by how they differ from us.

The kind of dead ones who don't really expect to ever be raised,

Who stay in our dark tombs and funeral wrappings,

Submitting to death. . .

Even settling into it.

Until Jesus arrives.

Until Jesus calls, "Come out!"

Until light floods into the tomb,

And burial clothes fall off.

We are all good and dead,
Bound and buried.
Until Jesus arrives and calls us to life.

In our baptism,
We are both drowned in these waters
And raised through them.
We are released from the bindings of sin,
And called out of the tomb to new life.
Without Jesus,
Without his voice right outside our tomb calling to us,
We are nothing but good and dead.

In this Meal of Jesus' own body and blood,
A body that was truly dead on a cross,
Blood that was poured out,
In this Meal we are both united in His death and joined
to His resurrection.

We hear Jesus call out to us, even today,
"My body and blood given and shed for you."
And we are fed,
Nourished,
Alive.

Without Jesus,
Without his own dying and rising,
We are nothing but good and dead.

It's interesting to note that as Lazarus comes out of the tomb,

The text still refers to him as "the dead man."

"The dead man came out."

Not "the man who was dead,"

Or even "Lazarus came out,"

But "the dead man came out."

One more reminder that he was completely dead.

One more reminder that,

In some ways,

He still is.

In some ways,

We all are. . .

We are dead to sin,

Dead to the powers of this world that try to entrap and
entomb us,

Dead even to death.

Because Christ has shown us and promised us that in the good and
dead,

God has chosen to claim us and raise us.

For good.