

All Saints' Day Year B Lazarus, Come Out John 11:32-44

This story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, and its immediate aftermath, is a crucial turning point in John's Gospel. From the beginning, John has built his story around a series of signs performed by Jesus starting, in Chapter 2, with Jesus turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. We are now in Chapter 11 and we have witnessed these signs inspire many to believe in Jesus, to follow him, and even to worship him.

However, we have also seen these signs turn the religious leadership against Jesus. He has power, he has authority, and he has followers – followers believing in the message he preaches and the message he embodies with his actions. His message is one of equality and inclusivity for all, upsetting the balance of power that the religious leadership is currently enjoying. Jesus is a threat and they are angry and fearful. Raising Lazarus from the dead, demonstrating the ability to back up his revolutionary words, is the last straw for the leadership. Jesus is dangerous and Jesus must be killed.

Jesus is well aware of the path he is travelling. When he receives word that his friend, Lazarus, is gravely ill, his disciples warn him that he must not go to him. Bethany, where Lazarus lives, is just two miles outside of Jerusalem – way too close for comfort to the establishment harbouring murderous feelings against their beloved teacher.

But Jesus goes anyway. It may seem odd that Jesus waits until his friend is dead until we realize that Jesus knows he is about to break the camel's back. He has healed plenty of people already. This time, he is going to push the final button – to show to the people who he is, to put his power on display...power that clearly says he is the bread of life, he is the way, the truth, and life, he is the drink that quenches all thirst, he is the way to eternal life for those who believe he is...all of these scandalous things that Jesus has been proclaiming he is about to show them to be true.

How disappointing, then, for him to be greeted with doubt. His dearest friends know he has some power but they don't understand, do not believe, the full

extent of his power and who he is. Martha's first words to Jesus when he finally arrives are full of bitterness – "I know you have the power to heal. If you had been here," she accuses, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary, echoes her sister's sense of betrayal, "If you had been here, our brother would still be alive."

They know Jesus is able to heal – he has the power to heal those who are still alive. But after all of the time Jesus has spent with them, after all of his teachings, after all of his miracles, they reveal in their bitter words, that they do not fully believe, they do not completely trust all that their beloved teacher has said to them.

This greatly affects Jesus but, without a little bit of knowledge of Greek, we don't know how this affects Jesus. Our translations allow us to misinterpret what is going on. When Mary arrives weeping, and the Jews accompanying her are weeping, we hear that Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. He was deeply moved alright – but not with compassion and sorrow. Jesus was irritated. To be blunt, he was pissed off. The Greek word (enebrimesato) that is translated as "deeply moved" literally means "groaned with indignation" and "sighed with chagrin." And the word (etaraxen) that is translated as "troubled" is actually "agitated" or "stirred up." A modern equivalent would be to say that those people who are weeping have "poked the bear."

Jesus has been preaching and teaching and healing and performing other miracles and the people just don't get it. To use another modern expression, he feels like he's been talking to a brick wall. He is frustrated and exasperated to the point of anger at the thick-headedness and refusal to open hearts and minds completely to accept what he has been saying to the people and showing to the people.

Jesus asks where they have laid Lazarus and hears the words, "Come and see." Come and see...the very same words he had used when he had called his first disciples to follow him. That did it. Hearing those words hit him where it hurts and he wept. "Jesus wept," the verse simply says. And we, like the Jews in the story misinterpret those words and we say, "Ahh, see how much he loved

Lazarus.” Yes, he loves Lazarus. He also knows he is about to raise Lazarus to life again. Jesus is not crying over the death of a friend.

That Greek word (edakysen) for “wept” is only used once – right here, to say, “Jesus wept.” It does mean to shed tears but it is not the same word used earlier to say that Mary and the others were weeping. Mary and the others were, indeed, mourning and lamenting the death of Lazarus. Jesus is shedding tears of anger and frustration.

Then they poke the bear some more by saying, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Jesus again groans with indignation as they arrive at the tomb.

Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept my loved one from dying? Cannot he who cured the lepers cure all diseases? Cannot he who made the world just simply fix the world? Like Mary and Martha, the dear friends and disciples of Jesus, we sometimes have a faith that is less than 100%. We sometimes experience doubts and questions. “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief,” we cry when we are sure we believe and yet we are not sure...all at the same time. Why do my prayers go unanswered? Why is there so much evil in the world? I believe in God. Is there a God? I’ll know for sure when I die.

Doubts and questions are a normal part of faith. They can creep into the mind of even the staunchest believer. Although, like Mary and Martha, we can cause our Lord to weep sometimes, he does not give up...He continues to call to us and he shows us his power.

For we don’t just play the part of a Mary or Martha in this story. “Lazarus, come out,” Jesus calls. And we who, through the mystery of baptism have died with Jesus, have been placed in the tomb with Jesus, we come out of the tomb. “Lazarus, come out,” Jesus commands. And we who have been given new life, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, made a new creation in our baptisms, we emerge from death.

We are given a second chance at life. We have experienced the power of Christ, raised to new life – freed from death because we have been shown that death

does not have the final word. The One who weeps for us is with us. The One with the power over death does not let go of us, even when we doubt, but, rather, calls us out of the tomb.

“Lazarus, come out.” What do we do when we experience the new life given to us by Jesus? We turn to Lazarus to give us the answer. He is unbound and let go...and the next we hear of him, he is hosting a dinner in Jesus’ honour. What does a dinner given in Jesus’ honour look like? Who is invited? Who does the serving? We know all of those answers.

We are called by Jesus, unbound from death that we might witness and serve. Given the opportunity to live a new life...what we do with that opportunity is our choice. Lazarus, come out.