



(@ 8a) This is a bittersweet Sunday. We read the names of some who have preceded us in death and we grieve that death since we are no longer able to see the ones we loved. And, at the 10:30 service, we will baptize into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, two babies. Two new lives that will join with ours to be the body of Christ. Celebration and sweet remembrance today.

The story of Lazarus is like today because we have the grief and sorrow of death, the mystery of why Jesus held off for 2 days after he had received word of Lazarus's death before going to Bethany to be with his friends Mary and Martha. The shortest verse in the Bible: Jesus wept.

Did Jesus weep because whatever it was that had kept him for 2 days before responding to the cry of distress wasn't very important? Did Jesus weep because he was frustrated at the lack of faith of Mary, Martha and those gathered mourning the death of Lazarus? We know that Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit. He was deeply moved.

And the criticism begins: could not this Jesus who opened the eyes of the blind and who healed the sick have not kept Lazarus from dying? Certainly he could have. What, then, is the purpose of Jesus not arriving in time to keep Lazarus from dying? Sometimes, it seems, the ministry of Jesus needs to unfold the way it does even when we don't understand it and it seems that perhaps there was suffering that could have been cut short.

By allowing Lazarus to die, to be in the tomb for four days, Jesus sent a clear message to Martha, Mary and their friends. Lazarus was really, really dead. At that time, the common belief was the spirit of the deceased stuck around for 3 days. By waiting until the 4th day, then, Jesus knew that those mourning the death of Lazarus would have given up hope that it was a mistake. That Lazarus was in a coma and not really dead.

By waiting until the 4th day, the glory of God that was in Jesus was well and truly revealed. Other healers and miracle workers of the time would not be able to raise someone dead for 4 days. The power of God expressed through Jesus surpassed what anyone else could do. Jesus calls to Lazarus: Come out! and he does, stumbling a bit perhaps since he is still clothed in burial cloths. The burial cloths of our world still bound up Lazarus so he might have come out of the tomb lurching and with halting steps- not at all the pictures we have of Jesus at the resurrection where the burial cloths are left on the stone benches inside the tomb. Lazarus was still bound.

In order for Lazarus to hear Jesus, the stone covering the tomb must first be rolled away. Access to Lazarus needs to be opened up. The stone must be taken away. With parallels to the resurrection except that there was no one at the resurrection to roll away the stone. Through God's action - not human effort- the stone of Jesus's tomb was rolled away. Nothing human and nothing in creation- can keep us from Jesus if that is our true desire.

Then Jesus commands those present to unbind Lazarus. To strip away the burial cloths that are keeping him dead. Stripping away the burial cloths enables Lazarus to return to the living, in relationship with Mary, Martha, the crowds and most of all with Jesus.

Today's Gospel encourages us to ask where we are like Lazarus. Where are we bound by the things of this earth and what will it take for us to rip away the burial cloths and return to right relationship with Jesus. Where might we be enclosed in a tomb and need help rolling away a stone that is keeping us in darkness? Or if we are not Lazarus, are we Mary or Martha grieving so hard for the death of a loved one that we have trouble seeing God's grace and mercy in our lives. And, do we have ears to hear and hands to help when we are asked to help roll away the stone or take up the burial cloths that bind a dear one? Once again the story of Lazarus is one of Jesus calling us to act. We are to unbind the Lazarus we know- and it might be ourselves and it might be our nearest and dearest. We are to get up, trusting that the God who became flesh in Jesus will show us the way to eternal life.

Belief in Jesus, as Lord and Christ, can help us see that there is a new heaven and a new earth. That the home of God is among mortals and God dwells with us and we are God's people. God is making all things new- for this life and the life beyond. And we can say that in sure and certain confidence that God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. And that those who die in the faith of the Lord will never die but have life eternal. And when our time comes, we too shall join with the great cloud of witnesses, singing Alleluia, Alleluia. Amen and Amen.