



Sounds of endings all around us, darkness, death and winter days, shroud our days in fear and sadness, numbing mouths that long to praise. Come, O Christ, and dwell among us! Hear our cries and set us free. Give us hope and faith and gladness. Show us what there yet can be.¹

Jesus raises someone from the dead in each of the four gospels although the raising of Lazarus occurs only in the Gospel of John. Osvaldo Vena, Professor of New Testament at Garrett Evangelical Seminary at Northwestern, reminds us that

the name Lazarus means “God helps.”² Seems to me that raising someone from the dead is probably the greatest help that God can give!

Seriously, though, the Gospel and the reading from Ezekiel ask us to think about what comes after death as much as it does about the power of God over death. As we remember from the Book of Romans: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things to come, nor powers... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God.” That is a promise we can hold tight to, most especially when our world is crashing all about us.

Lazarus was raised from the dead after 4 days. After the point in time that the soul was believed to have departed from the body and true bodily corruption set in. A time when you better have your handkerchief over your nose or the Vicks VapoRub spread on your upper lip to help kill the smell as the stone was rolled away. An act that only someone crazy – or the Son of God- would ask be done. Lazarus would stink! Lazarus was dead. His life was over.

Well, we all know what happened. The stone was rolled away. Jesus called: Lazarus come out! I imagine there was dead silence (pun intended). Slowly, hesitantly, ears straining for the slightest sound, the people waited. And then they heard and then they saw. A man, wrapped in burial cloths, comes stumbling into the light. The dead man walking. Still bound. Face still covered.

Jesus calls on those present to “unbind him and let him go.” Death has no more power over Lazarus for the moment. Lazarus is brought into new life through the power of Jesus who calls to him to move out of darkness and into the light. This new life, though, is not one that Lazarus

¹ Wonder, Love and Praise #721.

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3192 (April 1, 2017)

lives alone. Others were and are needed to unbind him and help him figure out what it means to be alive once again.

Community was vitally important then and it is vitally important now. A few weeks ago the Vestry met to consider where we are as a parish and where we might go, focusing especially on Outreach. I asked each Vestry member to start by recalling what they liked most about St. John's. Time after time the answers included community. We stand together. We act for each other and for our community. We strive to be a light to the world, carrying our faith out those red doors into service for others. And, we are present with each other in times of sorrow and sadness. We are a community of faith living the gospel in ways big and small. We are more together than we are alone.

In recounting the raising of Lazarus, John tells us that many of those who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. Our story – our witness whether through words or deeds- is important. Someone may come to faith through how you live your life. Through how you turned from behavior or beliefs or attitudes that were not life-giving into ways that support and respect the dignity of every human being.

Anyone who has had a near death experience will tell you that life after that experience is not the same as it was before, regardless of the cause that led to that experience. Such an experience is a hinge-point. A before and an after. Or even if someone doesn't have a near death experience, they can have a "wake-up call" that helps them to evaluate their life and encourage them to make some changes that are life-giving. Think of the business executive working 80 hours a week who has a "come to Jesus moment" and realizes that time is slipping away, children are growing up and life down the road looks pretty bleak if the executive doesn't take action to change work habits and find ways to spend time with family and friends – the real wealth in our lives.

The raising of Lazarus is a hinge point – both for Lazarus, for Mary and Martha, for those who came to see what Jesus was about, and for us. Jesus has the power to give us new life and to give us a life abundant with the promises and the love of God. We can choose to reach out and accept this new life or we can choose to remain in our tomb, bound in grave clothes that restrict us until we die. It is our choice. Do you hear the voice of Jesus calling your name? Come out! Come out and live. Come out and love.

*Speak O God your word among us. Barren lives your presence fill.
Swell our hearts with songs of gladness. Terrors calm forebodings still.
Let your promised realm of justice blossom now throughout the earth.
Your dominion now bring near us; we await the saving birth.³*
Amen.

³ Id.