

John 11:1-45

Today the tension between death and the hope of resurrection is palpable especially during Lent.

Even today we have global instability, wars and always an uncertain future. Amid painful circumstances and social realities along with the fear that goes with it...we too want a resurrection...an unbinding that releases us from fear and death to allow us to imagine what new life for us might look like.

To imagine a world in which wholeness, well-being, health and prosperity for everyone are normal expressions of our human existence and for us to partner with God making that vision a reality.

Now John is the only gospel that doesn't specifically talk about the kingdom of God, instead he points to a reality of oneness and wholeness with God through Jesus the Christ.

So, we are invited to consider the possibility of resurrection today and in the lives of so many people and communities who deeply need God to show up right NOW!

So, what hinders us? One real challenge is our skewed perception of reality! Objects in mirror can seem closer than they appear. And our human distortion is exacerbated when we throw fear into the mix...Mary sums it up...Hey Jesus if you had only been here sooner! Too late!

Just look at the way our media distorts the truth and the facts...even explaining justifying killing in war or even how distorted they can make something as simple as an impending snowfall.

See mob mentality is a thing and at its heart is always generating fear. That's not to say we ignore safety precautions, but each community must carefully weigh the risks of living fully in the world.

Are our decisions made for the good of humanity or profits...love or fear?

As my mother always said they are gonna write something on your death certificate...but is death our final destination?

See what Jesus is inviting us into is a reality in which we put in perspective and hold loosely the things of this world... so that we can more easily die to earthly things knowing that death isn't the final chapter and that regardless of the death in question...we will be made into something new.

Today the disciples are afraid for Jesus' life and their own. They just avoided a stoning earlier and are questioning their journey...and for Lazarus...well the guy's already dead...as Jesus and His disciples approach Mary and Martha's home the tension is ramping up...it's the prelude to Holy week.

There is weeping and lamenting...It has been four days...significant because for the Hebrew mindset the soul leaves the body after three days so in fact Lazarus has left the building...his soul is gone, his body decaying...he's really, really, dead! Well maybe not...

The resurrection...and the life!

Resurrection NOW...Life NOW! Come out Lazarus! And Lazarus means God's help (COME out with God's help)

Resurrection Now...how might we all live into a new reality NOW...How can we all have life together now!

But grieving cannot be skipped over can it...even Jesus knowing the outcome weeps for His friend and for all those witnessing...death is never carefree or worry free is it...fear of death for ourselves and for those we care about is a natural part of our human condition...and death is always gonna cost us something...so one must always grieve before one can truly die and make space for something new.

And even new life to some may cause fear not only in us but for the status quo...some run to the authorities...and what is their response...we

are the power here and those that threaten our power will be eliminated by Church and State! And out of Caiaphas' own mouth...better one die for the sake of many (and their ways of life) than change how we always do things.

Some things never change?

Unwittingly Caiaphas actually and sets into motion the power of God to make Caiaphas' word's true in the cosmic sense! That one will die for the sake of all! Jesus through his life, death and resurrection will be the divine example...and His sacrifice will not just save and reconcile the Jewish People, or believers, but the whole world...its the Cosmos for John.

With God's help...Come out of your tombs and come into the light.

Today we join with communities bound by the shrouds of war, genocide, poverty, disease, abuse and systematic oppression. And God freeing those bound in tombs also demands something from us too!

Though Jesus called Lazarus from the Tomb he tells the crowd...that's us...to go and unbind him and let him go.

We here at Holy Family are called to unbind those newly resurrected and set them free of death and fear. We must remove the shrouds from those in social isolation, the marginalized, the oppressed...to free them of their fear and grief, their anxiety and loss.

...And when we are at the greatest risk of fear or danger...can we hear the voice of our shepherd calling us out of our darkness and into the light...Come OUT to new life NOW.

The irony here is that when this takes place that's the same time that the forces of darkness...ego, power and fear sentence Jesus to death...and this leads us right into Holy week...

It's the fulcrum of John's Gospel as Jesus goes from Teaching to do... in the ultimate expression of what God's been trying to show us all

along...where fear, suffering and death no longer have the final word...when we follow Jesus straight to God and into new life...now and forever.

Lazarus means God helps...his is a story about his illness, death, burial, decay, and emergence from a tomb...being recalled from death to life even with the burial wrappings still clinging to him.

This is the last sign in John's gospel. This account only appears here and nowhere else.

This is John's climax and the literal and figurative center of his gospel Chapter 11. There are 10 chapters before and 10 chapters after...It looks like a Bell curve in seven parts. Part 1 and 7 explore the ideas of Jesus as the Son of God...the Cosmic Christ!

The 2nd and 6th are Jesus' glorifying God...first by signs and then by His death. The 3rd and 5th parts looks at the union of Jesus with God first in Actions and then in the Word (Logos)...and today we have the middle part 4 the hinge of the gospel...The ultimate sign in action...the raising of Lazarus...foreshadowing God's ultimate sign in action...Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus descends into the world and then ascends to the father...it's a motion...a wave! Chapter 11 is also the tipping point between Jesus' public ministry and his private ministry to His disciples.

Chapter 11 represents a climax...the ultimate sign, the last in a series of 7 (the sacred number of completion) ...and a foreshadowing of his own death and resurrection. It is also a moment of profound irony because the one who is the resurrection... and the life, ...the light of the world, now begins to walk His own dark path through suffering and death...seems even God can't get to new life without dying to something first...whether that's' physical or anything else...

John's gospel now shifts to the disciples...and whereas the overturning of the money changers tables brings about a call for Jesus' death in the other gospels... in John's gospel it is this miracle with Lazarus that triggers His death sentence.

Here Jesus' enemies shift from general opposition to a concrete decision to have him killed. The story today signals the beginning of the end for Jesus here.

Stories of Jesus raising the dead appear in all the Gospels, but John alone includes the story of the raising of Lazarus. It signifies that God's promises are already among us to include all our suffering and deaths. These signs reveal Jesus pointing to God in oneness.

And once again the sheep hear Jesus' voice. There is a lot of seeing, hearing and believing in John's gospel. His community was far removed from "seeing" Jesus and were left with the story. As later reinforced by Jesus' words to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet come to believe" Flipping faith from experience to belief for John's community because Jesus physically has not come back.

So, what does it mean that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? That we are raised to life...not at some future state, but that life with God is right now and right here.

For Lazarus, the Gospel does not describe a future with Jesus, but a present state... It is here and now, because in the Gospel of John, it is not just the death of Jesus...but the life of Jesus that brings about our salvation. For the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, through which "we have all received grace upon grace"

But here in the kingdom of man, it's easy to despair...Both Martha and Mary meet Jesus with the same words: if you had only been here...How often do we use those words? If only!

Lord, if you had been here...Lord, if you had come when I asked...Lord, life hurts and I asked for help and I feel like you left me...Lord, it's too late, the grief is here! The door is shut. The tomb is sealed.

Have you ever felt abandoned by God? Has God's apparent absence in your life made you grieve? There were many times in my own life when I wondered where God was, and if he still cared about me. It took me a long time to realize that God had not, in fact abandoned me. It was actually more like the other way around – I had abandoned God. God was patiently waiting for me...return = repent.

Jesus tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life," and then he challenges her. Jesus asks Martha if she believes. It's interesting that John always puts this word into its active verb form. John doesn't talk about belief as a noun, but always as what Jesus asks us to do...to trust in God...trust!

"Where have you laid him?" Jesus asks. In a couple of weeks, another Mary will ask this same question as she looks into an empty tomb. She will weep as Jesus does now. Here, in this long passage, the most profound verse is very short "Jesus wept."

Death stinks.

And then you are called forth...and you get to choose whether to go back and stay in the tomb...in the darkness, bound...can you hear God's voice and step out into the light into something new...the unknown?!

And here's the thing: we just can't experience resurrection until we experience death. We can't accept new life in Christ until we allow our old selves to die.

What do you need to let go of...let die, so that you can come out of your tomb? What binds you to death, and prevents you from living a full abundant life as a new creation?

What binds you...addiction, pride, hatred, lust, greed, deceit, or whatever stinks in your life, hear the voice of Jesus calling to you, "Come out of there!"

And then you get to choose. The tomb and the familiar or the unknown and new life? Because what lies ahead is new territory. And you don't have to go there alone. When Lazarus steps out of the tomb, there were his friends there to help him out of his wrappings...to support him and love him.

That's what our community of faith is for to help one another get unbound.

So, what in our church here in Laurel Springs do we need to let die so that this congregation can experience new life? What binds us so tightly that we can't move forward? What shrouds keep us from seeing our neighbors around us and what prevents us from experiencing resurrection?

So here we are at the end of Lent...and as we stumble forward, a loving, familiar voice says, "Come out of there! Get unbound!" We are stepping into new territory...something new here...together...but do not be afraid!

Jesus is right here, outside waiting for us to come out and step into the light.

Your faithful servant,
carmen