

Fifth Sunday in Lent
"The Giver of Life"
John 11:1-45

Today we are in John's Gospel. And as you've read through John you may have noticed that throughout this book there are a series of signs that reveal who Jesus is.

In John, chapter two, the first sign is Jesus changing of water into wine,
Later, come healings, like the healing of the blind man, and then the Feeding of the 5,000.
And now in Chapter 11, the Raising of Lazarus.

Each sign, reveals the life-giving power of Jesus.

But here, in the middle of Lent, doesn't the story of Lazarus seem a bit out of place?
A man being raised from the dead. Doesn't that sound more like an Easter story?

Why in the middle of Lent do we have this passage where Jesus tells Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the Life"?

One reason, is that John's Gospel from beginning to end, is full of testimony to Jesus' life-giving power.

In John, Chapter 1 we hear:

"In the beginning was the Word...in Him was life, and that life was the light of all people."

In John, Chapter 3:

"For God so loved the World, that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life."

In Chapter 4:

Jesus told the woman at the well,

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,
but whoever drinks the water I give him, will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give, will become in him, a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

In Chapter 5

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my Word and believes him who sent me has eternal life...
and will not be condemned, they have crossed over from death to life."

And then, in Chapter 10, right before today's Gospel, Jesus says:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly."

John is just not going to let us miss the reason Jesus came.
Jesus is the Lord and Giver of Life!

The second reason that we don't save the Lazarus story for Easter, is this:
Whenever there is a tomb in our lives, Jesus shows up!

We don't save this story for Easter, because the reality is we can't wait!
There are too many dry places in our lives that need living water, too many tombs that need to be opened up.

A few years ago, my family and I gathered at one of those tombs.
My Grandma Ingeborg had died. It's true that she had lived a good long life, almost 102 years, but for my mom and for the rest of us who loved her it was still a tomb.

And we grieved her death.
Like Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus had died, my mom and her sister JoAnne, along with their brother Phil, grieved the death of their mother.

And yet, just like we heard in today's Gospel the tombs of life can't keep Jesus away.
Jesus shows up and the story changes.

Through my Grandma's pastor, a man who knew my Grandma well, God spoke a word of hope to us.
And we needed that word of hope, not just for the occasion of my Grandma's funeral but also for my uncle Mike and my aunt JoAnne.

Their second oldest son was in a different kind of tomb.
The weekend of my Grandma's funeral he called us from his jail cell.

My uncle Phil and aunt Karna, had also been facing some tombs.
Phil had been battling cancer, their eldest daughter has suffered her whole life with severe form of epilepsy, and their other daughter had just gone through a divorce.
And it's not just my family. If you get to know any family you will find tombs like these.

Sometimes we are overwhelmed by the force of these tombs. We begin to wonder like Mary and Martha, why Jesus hasn't made his presence known.
Doubt and despair begin to wrap themselves around us.

But remember, wherever there is a tomb in our lives, Jesus shows up!
Jesus called out to Lazarus and said, "Come out!"

And just as he spoke to Lazarus, he speaks to you and me.
"Come out from your tomb of grief and sorrow,
for I have called you my beloved sons and daughters and I shall comfort you."

"Come out, and let the grave clothes of doubt and despair, fall to the ground."

"Let the wrappings of fear and worry unravel."

“Let me free you from your bondage to sin.”

As we listen to the voice of Jesus, the strips of linen covering our eyes will be removed. And we will begin to see the life God has in store for us.

Former Luther Seminary president, David Tiede was speaking at chapel one day, and he was preaching about this Gospel story.

And he said something like this:

“You will know the Gospel as a pure promise when God’s word of hope comes to you in a time of weakness.”

“When you feel the chill, of the cold dark tombs of your life, consider this:

All “those who know the depth of God’s love, will be lifted up with courage and hope, especially during times of suffering, grief, or loss.”

We need to hear that pure promise.

We need to hear it in these next few weeks as we follow the Lord and Giver of life, to Gethsemane, and then to the Cross.

While Mary and Martha celebrate Lazarus being brought back to life, we hear that the authorities have now marked Jesus for death.

Because it will take a tomb of his own, to once and for all, take away the power of the tombs we face.

Jesus declared to Martha and he declares to us today,

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me, will never die.”

The Lord and Giver of Life has come to give us life, and life abundantly. Amen