

Raising Lazarus: The Miracle of Resurrection

Ask yourself, "What in your life is dead or is dying?" Be really honest. It could be your faith. It could be Hope. It could be Love. Just maybe something inside of you *has* died, and God wants to bring it back to life.



John 11:1-16 (NIV) Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas (*called Didymus*) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Reflections

During summers here at St. John we offer a worship outdoors in the front yard of our office house. There is lots of room, but the prime seats are in the shade of several magnificent Norway Maple trees that provide cooling shade. Those Norway Maples are special to me, even though I've sat under them only the past 5 summers. They are special as they always rekindle a memory of a special Norway Maple in my childhood.

Growing up my family would often visit my mother's parents who lived outside of Williams Bay, Wisconsin, a beautiful area in the country. My grandfather's front yard had a large Norway Maple tree that he had planted when he built the home in the 1920s. Some 40 years later my brothers, our friends and I would spend hours in that Norway Maple playing all sorts of games.

Planting a tree, it seems to me, is really about hope. My grandfather planted that tree years before we

came along, knowing it would grow, if cared for, and would provide shade, shelter and enjoyment for the future members of his family.

Quite a few years after those fun summers of the 1960s I visited my grandparent's home, now passed from our family after the passing of my grandparents, to show my children the place where my summer memories came from. To my sadness that Norway Maple had been cut down, finally succumbing to age. I told my brothers of this when I saw them after that trip, telling them 'the tree was cut down' and they knew instantly what I meant. Really a time of sadness, but something else happened.

Trying to figure out what to write this week I had a conversation with Dale Fixsen about my struggles with today's text. I related the story of my grandfather's Norway Maple. He told me a similar story about a great Elm tree that he and his siblings used for their games as a child, that Elm always being 'home base'. That tree succumbed to Dutch Elm disease

and had to be cut down too. Dale and I smiled at each other as we recalled our memories of these special trees. Brothers in Christ, brothers in shared memories.

The apparent death of Lazarus was clearly more shattering than cutting down two fondly remembered trees. Many of us face moments like Mary and Martha, facing the death of a loved one, the betrayal of someone close, or another painful, hurtful event. Here, in this story Jesus teaches us that in the midst of that agony and loss, God's real presence can provide us with the faith, hope and love needed to overcome our loss and renew our relationship with Jesus, who willingly gave up his life for us.

Sure, the loss of a favorite childhood tree is somewhat trivial compared to other losses we may experience, but the power of the Lord to comfort us with his Love, his Hope, and his gift of Faith in every life event. Pray that you will be open to experience God at work in your life always.

—Karl Berland

Readings

Sunday, May 10

John 11:1-16

The story of Lazarus begins with Lazarus being sick. His sisters, Mary and Martha recognized that Lazarus was very sick, and they sent a message to Jesus to let him know. How can you recognize your own illnesses (*mind-body-spirit*) in time to seek the Lord's comfort?

Monday, May 11

Ephesians 2:1-6

What are three characteristics of a person who is still "dead in their sins"? If you are a Christ-follower, describe your life while you were still "dead" in your sins. When did God raise you from the dead? How is your life different today?

Tuesday, May 12

Romans 6:4-11

Paul, the writer of the letter to the Romans, explains the key to following Jesus: Our old ways are now in the past, dead, and we now live in the present in the love of Jesus Christ, with the promise of His Peace every day and a forever together with Jesus because of the resurrection. As you wake up tomorrow, how can you set your mind better on Jesus and let your old ways die?

Wednesday, May 13

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is a time for everything, including death. What do you need to let go of today so that you may live in more of the faith, hope, and love of Christ?

Thursday, May 14

Genesis 22:1-19

Oh, the things of this world that we love! Imagine Abraham being commanded to put to death Isaac, his only son, who God gave to he and Sarah. Jesus freed us from the sins of the world, but sets the expectation that we will be faithful. How can knowing the great story of Abraham's love for God help you follow Jesus better today?

Friday, May 15

Galatians 2:20

A mystery of our faith is that in death comes transformation and new life! When we turn away from those thoughts and desires of this world and live our life as blessed by Jesus' death and resurrection, we face the world with a new confidence. Spend time in prayer exploring with Jesus how you have been saved. Seek His guidance for how He would have you proclaim the Good News for the benefit of others.

Saturday, May 16

1 Corinthians 15:3

We use creeds to express our unshakable beliefs. Here at the beginning of the Christian Church, Paul expresses the first Creed: that Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day. The 'death' we face as we let God's transforming power into our hearts comes from Jesus willingness to die for us. How will you allow this early creed to guide you as you die to your old ways and work every day at living in His love?

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