



A LENTEN RETREAT: Week Five

The final week of our retreat invites us into the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This story invites us to reflect on the deepening of faith that comes through an experience of death. We might need to remember here that our experience of death doesn't always have to be physical death. There are a number of other types of "death" that happen in our lives and each of these have something to offer us in terms of deepening our faith. Some of those other types of "death" might be: the death of our youth - we have advanced enough in years that we are no longer young, the death of our wholeness - some part of our physical or psychological life must be left behind, the death of our dreams - we reach a point in life where the dreams we had in our youth are not going to materialize, the death of our honeymoons - every new experience has a "honeymoon" phase and when those are over we have to adjust to life on a more even keel, the death of a certain idea of God or Church - as our faith deepens so too does our image of God and Church. Life is full of transitions, or deaths and resurrections.

We might break down this story in terms of the reactions of the disciples and Martha and Mary.

The disciples are troubled or confused by the indifference that Jesus seems to have to Lazarus' death. They misunderstood when Jesus said, "sleep." Some people may be more comfortable with these experiences of death than others. Our past experiences of death may have given us more confidence in resurrection than those who maybe are experiencing death for the first time. There can be quite a difference in how people mourn physical death. We might reflect on our own comfort or discomfort with death and how we mourn the death of those we love.

Martha believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that Lazarus would rise on the last day. Her faith was an inadequate faith in terms of believing that Jesus could raise Lazarus not only on the last day but also here and now. Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, at Cana, Martha puts a demand on Jesus at the level of human friendship and human need, "if only you had been here my brother would not have died." But when Jesus ordered Lazarus' tomb to be opened, it was Martha who hesitated ("Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days."). On the human level it was fine for Jesus to heal, but raising Lazarus from the dead was not what Martha had in mind or wanted. Martha in effect puts her own limits on Jesus' power. Maybe those limits come from Martha having seen Jesus heal but she had not seen him raise someone from the dead. Maybe she didn't realize this was even a possibility.

"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

We too put limitations on the power of Jesus because we think we know what might be best in a situation. We might think that God should heal in this situation, and in that situation allow life to end in this world and begin the new life of resurrection. But that is not our choice to make but our reality to deal with. No matter what happens whether healing or death, we need to trust that God is working in both of those situations. We need to accept what has happened and learn from it.

SCRIPTURE **PASSAGES FOR** **THE WEEK**

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

John 11:1-45

The raising of Lazarus
- reread the story

Psalm 142

God rescues us

2Corinthians 5:17-21

New creation in Christ

1John 1:1-4

Eternal life

Ephesians 2:1-10

Generous love of God

Psalm 71

An old man's prayer

Romans 8:18-25

Destiny of glory

John 21:1-25

Resurrection appearance of Jesus

Use one of the forms of praying with Scripture from last week's bulletin or simply read the above passages and hear God speaking to you of his love.

We might also look at this story from the perspectives of Jesus and Lazarus. In the story we are told that Lazarus comes forth bound with the burial clothes and the men have to unbind him. If we remember from the stories of the resurrection of Jesus that he leaves the burial clothes behind in the tomb. He does this because he will never have to die again. Lazarus was brought back to life still wrapped in the burial clothes because he would need them because he would have to die again.

The little “deaths” we encounter in this life have us hold on to those burial clothes because we will have to die again. We need to remember what we learn from each of those experiences of death in order to be prepared for the final death. Paul says that death is the last enemy to be destroyed. Jesus shows in this story that he has the power to destroy this enemy we call death.

‘Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.’