

Sermon, for Merimbula UCA
March 26, 2023
Rev. John C. Blair, Th.M. Guest Preacher
“Lazarai”

Psalm 130...

We cry together, God (Love) hears us, and can help us endure. God (Love) forgives, as we practice mercy. As we learn, we can be “Redeemed!”. Let’s think together¹

John 11: 1-45...

Jesus loved his disciples, among them Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Lazarus’ name has roots in both Greek and Hebrew with common meanings: “Whom God Helps”, and. “God has helped”, respectively.

My reflection this morning is historic...ever since stories were invented, by expressions noted, gestures made, grunting symbolised, and words perfected, expanded, and given particular nuances, story tellers have been made welcome—or, chased out of the village! Not just the bad ones, either...the good ones that dared to sometimes tell the truths, had to run faster, hide, or face unpleasant consequences.

I have a hunch that Lazarus was good value, and his two sisters bonded well and taught him, just as he, in all likelihood, had taught them...maybe they were not only careful, but clever students when the three of them met this fellow Jesus.

Jesus certainly had his ups and downs. We have heard some of his struggles... after his cousin John the Baptizing one was imprisoned, and then killed, Jesus went to the desert. He WAS tested! We have heard you, Rev. Jean, talk to us, and, wonderful preaching it has been...(shall I continue?!).

Today’s part of the Johannine Gospel focuses on Lazarus dying and eventual outcome...literally, coming out of the cave/grave. So many questions confront us so many times, before we are given that miraculous “ending”.

Lazarus was dying in Bethany, where he lived with or near his sisters. When Jesus was told he, it could be said, seemed to deny it...(the first stage death and dying theorists say we all go through in such a crisis. “No, he is bringing glory for the Son of

God” !! That would be quite a declaration for mere mortals to make.

After two cars

collided in a school parking lot, one driver, expressing dismay, shock, grief, or a different kind of theology than I grew up with, was heard to exclaim: “It is God’s will!”.

Those words confused us, then, and I am still uncertain. Depending on the context, I have heard others say somewhat similar things, such as: “Everything happens for a reason”. I do believe that, except I don’t believe I know what the underlying reasons are. And the comment seldom brings much comfort...because it doesn’t embrace the pain being felt...it distracts, it dodges often inappropriately.

In Lazarus’ case, he was ill, and couldn’t contain his frustration or amusement about some unnamed patient of his, back in the States, The doctor told me, “I have a patient who has enjoyed ill health for many years!” (As far as we can tell, Lazarus, (he whom God helps) was not a hypochondriac! We are told he did die.

And then we may be perplexed to read that Jesus, an activist, a first responder, a reputed miracle worker, took his upset self off to a bedroom for two days, before putting on his sandals and walking the two miles (forty minutes’ walk) back to Bethany where, last time, some angry people had thrown rocks at him! Referring to oneself as a Son of God can be provocative! I understand there are some politicians who misrepresent themselves, their credentials, achievements, schooling, faith base, or suggest they have authority and a role in being our “Retribution” being a “stable genius”

—one critic said he has worked in horse stables, and knows exactly what he finds here, besides horses!!

I cannot think that a God of love is in anyway responsible for the miserable headlines on the evening or morning news programs we see on television now...

Lazarus’ death brings out many good people who have comforted Mary and Martha.

Maybe they tried to comfort Jesus, as well. Would he have needed it, if things were going to lead to the Glory of God? Confident, or anxious, Jesus announces he is going back to the place of some recent conflict. Thomas, the Twin, appears uncertain, and warns Jesus again about the dangers there. Jesus says Lazarus has fallen asleep, and needs to be awakened. Narcolepsy? Comatose? What was Lazarus’ problem?

Eventually, after Thomas says, “Let’s go, because we may die with Jesus!” They start walking the 3 kilometers’ (short) distance. Off he goes blindly with Jesus, oddly hopeful, that Jesus can be saved, one way or another.

Jesus and his followers stay at the edge of town, where Martha came out to meet him. She’s ambivalent: If Jesus had gotten there sooner, her brother would not have died.

Even so, whatever Jesus can do for her brother would be appreciated! “God will give you whatever you ask for!” Says Martha! “He will rise to life”, Jesus replied. “Yes, of course, **on the last day**”. Do you think she meant yesterday, or the day before, or when the world ends for everybody? Jesus, empowered by God (Love), challenges her to answer the question most important: “Do you believe in me, Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies!”

With a faith expressed better than Thomas’, Martha affirms Christ as the Messiah sent to be in this world. Then she fetched her sister Mary, who fell to her knees in front of Jesus, and said the exact same words (in the ‘Good News Bible translation) that Martha had hit Jesus with! Jesus saw her tears, and the affect of the crowd, and was touched in a powerful way...”Where have you buried him?” “Lord, come and see”. With all of that emotion, Jesus...! You know what he did next...The shortest verse in the Bible, we are taught:

All together, class: **“JESUS WEPT!!”**

And so, the stage is set for the most dramatic story, Lazarus comes forth, when called out by Jesus! The stone covering of the cave is somehow rolled out of the way, and Martha warns Jesus there will be a bad smell, since Lazarus died four days previous...Jesus re-informs Martha that he had told her she would see God’s glory if people—if she—believed.

Then he spoke up looking up above the heads of the people, to the heavens, to God his Father,

“Thank you for listening to me—I know you always do—and I say this for the sake of the people, that they may believe that you sent me”. : ‘LAZARUS, COME OUT!’

Many of the people who had come out to visit Mary, saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him.

And so the story doesn't end...not really...does it?

Re-gleaning ALL OF US!!!

- 1). What does Lazarus mean? Why would I call this Reflection. "Lazarai"
- 2). So, what is the condition that weakens us, (DON'T ANSWER HERE, NOT IN LOUD WORDS!)
- 3). ARE WE MUCH AWARE of the "caves" we might walk into? (My Dad, I may have told you, as he told me: "NEVER walk into a room you cannot walk out of!")⁴
- 4). As people of privilege, which caves can we "march" into, or out of, with reason? A voting booth might be cave-like? A grocery store with higher prices might be uncomfortable! A sanctuary, believe art or not, can make folk feel anxious, given their previous experiences with church folk, officials, committees, or lack of helpful contact previously!
- 5). What still wraps us up in the things that cause us to trip, lose our financial balances, hop-or-skip over smoother friendships, or fail to hear the voice of a leader who is calling to us?
- 6). What do we most often cry about, and is there something that can be better known, or done about it?
- 7). Where is the joy best felt, in friendships, past, present, or future?
- 8). Are our beliefs rational, healthy, safe, and moving us to peace?
- 9). Lazarus is honored by the Orthodox Church as having survived the tomb, and become a Bishop! What would you want to most say to him in a letter? No he will not join your favorite sports team! Be serious! If you prefer, write a letter to Martha, or to Mary!
- 10).

