

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

Dead. Dead. Dead.

That is probably the ugliest word in the English language. It carries with it such finality. It is the ultimate disconnection. It is the end. When someone we love dies, a part of us dies as well. It's the part that was connected to them. Death is ugly. Death is painful. Death destroys. Make no mistake about it, death is the ultimate enemy. Each person in this room has probably experienced the death of someone they love. No one needs to tell you how much it hurts. No one needs to tell you what it means to grieve. And no one needs to tell you how real it is. The person we love is no longer available to us. And life will never again be quite the same. We can't call them on the phone and hear their voice. We can't wrap our arms around them and get and give a big bear hug. We can't share a laugh or reach out to hold their hand. They aren't going to come walking through the door. We can't even have a good fight with them. We are disconnected. Permanently. Completely. Irrevocably. Make no mistake. Death is no joke. Death is cruel. It can wound us mightily and sometimes mortally.

That was the understanding of the meaning of death for the friends and family of Lazarus...and Jesus himself was one of those friends. It's easy to understand why Mary and Martha were so frantic when Lazarus became ill. And it's easy to understand why they sent for Jesus and asked him to come quickly. The worst that could happen was about to happen. They were about to lose Lazarus. Jesus' cavalier response is a bit hard to understand at first. He seems not worried in the least and is definitely not in a hurry. Jesus knows that Lazarus is dead even before they reach Bethany. And he knows that what has happened is for God's glory so

that, as he says, the Son of God may be glorified. Jesus has already marveled people by turning water into wine, by giving sight to the blind, by feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and some fish, by casting out demons, and by making the lame walk. All of these signs resulted in people following him, listening to him, even worshipping him. They know that Jesus is a powerful force among them.

As he approaches , Bethany, the little bedroom community just outside of Jerusalem, he's met by Martha and Mary who both chastise him for not coming in time to save Lazarus. Each of them says to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" They each lay the responsibility for Lazarus' death right at the feet of Jesus. It's all your fault!! Even the spectators wonder why a man who could make the blind see could not have prevented Lazarus from dying. The Scripture tells us about great emotional upheaval in Jesus that takes place as he surveys this scene. He's not distraught because Lazarus is dead. He knows what's going to happen. He knows that Lazarus is going to come back to life. He's probably not even distraught because the disciples still do not get it and his mission is nearing completion. Jesus probably isn't weeping out of frustration that his disciples still aren't quite sure who he is. The emotion that is described in the Greek is violent internal distress mixed with anger. We all know what that's like in the aftermath of the death of someone we love. We know that Jesus is the Son of God. We know that Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit are one. Perhaps the deep anguish and anger that Jesus is experiencing in his human body is a reflection of the deep anguish and anger God felt over the prospect of losing His creation forever...all of His creation...forever....a scenario being played out in this scene with Lazarus. Perhaps this disconnection between humanity and God in the form of death is what God is longing to repair...not just repair, but eliminate. Why else would God send his Son, Jesus, on such a mission? Why else was Jesus' task to destroy death once and for all if it wasn't to disrupt...for all time...the disconnection between God and human beings?

But this. This is different. This is no ordinary death. This is Jesus' friend, Lazarus, who is most assuredly and completely dead. This is personal for Jesus. Lazarus has

been in the tomb for four days and as his sister, Martha, (ever the meticulous housekeeper) reminds everyone, if we move the stone away there will be a terrible stench. Jesus doesn't seem to be worried! Mesmerized, all the witnesses are focused on the opening of the tomb. When the stone has been rolled away, Jesus says with great love and authority, "Lazarus, come out!"

And he did.

Jesus has now accomplished the ultimate sign. He has brought a clearly dead man back to life. He shows everyone what he was sent here to do. He is revealing his mission...to conquer death. Raising Lazarus is not only the preview of what Jesus will accomplish himself, it sets in motion all the events that will lead to Jesus' own death...and ultimately to his own resurrection. This is it! This is why Jesus came into our world...to defeat death...the ultimate enemy...the ultimate disconnection. It is death that separates us from God. Just as we do not wish to be separated from those we love, neither does God want to be separated from us...His own creation. Jesus entered our world so that such a thing would never have to happen again.

Now, we know that in this life, there are so many kinds of death...not just a physical death. In this life, there are situations and circumstances and emotions that cut us off from one another...that leave us feeling disconnected.

People suffering from mental illness not only feel cut off from others, but are also burdened by shame and feel a disconnection with themselves. Their ability to make connections with others has been hampered. Their ability to be an authentic self is impaired. Jesus has the power to reach into that dark place of mental illness and cry: "Come out!" and restore life.

We can look at the world around us and see people so consumed with hate and fear that they seek to destroy others. They are too afraid to risk being an authentic self because it requires them to be vulnerable. Stories about this kind of hate and fear are in the news almost every day. Jesus has the power to reach into that dark place of fear and insecurity and cry: "Come out!" as he restores life.

In our own lives, sometimes our sense of guilt over things both large and small can almost freeze us in place. We feel unable to move and often disconnected and we are afraid to be authentic because we are ashamed, but Jesus has the power to reach into that dark place and cry: “Come out!” as he restores life.

In our own families, perhaps because of family squabbles or disappointments or hurt feelings or even political differences, we feel cut off from one another. We don’t seem to be able to talk to one another in a way that reveals our true and authentic selves. Jesus has the power to reach into that dark place and cry: “Come out!” as he restores life.

Those who have fallen into the throes of addiction can be completely cut off from those they love and those who love them. It is a scary place from which people feel they cannot escape. And caught in the grip of addiction, they cannot be their authentic selves. But Jesus has the power to reach into that dark place and cry: “Come out!” as he restores life.

In our day and age, the phrase “coming out” refers to someone revealing their sexual orientation which risks disapproval and rejection from many others, but claims deep authenticity for the one ‘coming out.’ That’s what Jesus beckons *all* of us to do...to claim our authentic selves no matter what the risk or what our fear or what our authentic selves truly are. Authenticity...one human being to another...allows us to be our true selves with each other and to grow into the person that God made us to be. All kinds of things...not just sexual orientation...get in the way of our willingness to risk being truly authentic with others. But that authenticity is the bedrock of community and the foundation of all true relationships...beginning with our relationship with God. God already knows who we are. God already knows our authentic selves. God is a safe place for us. And God beckons us to claim our authentic self...the self that is God’s creation.

We remember the saints today...not the saints with a capital "S"...the ones who are far more perfect than we, but the ones who died in the faith...the ones who are on the other side of the veil as St. Paul says. They are now their completely authentic selves. We treasure them. We miss them. We value them. We look forward to being reunited with them. But even now, by the power of Jesus Christ, we share the same Holy Communion. As we gather around the altar to share that special meal, we are participating in the Communion of Saints...those on both sides of the veil. More centrally, this day is about what all God's saints have known and experienced, that here and now there is no death or grief or fear so deep and dark that the voice of Jesus cannot reach into it, call us out, and bring life.

The world provides many places and many situations in which we can get caught or lost. Whatever seems to have overtaken you; whatever seems to keep you from being free to be yourself...your authentic self that God created; whatever disconnects you from other people, just listen for this powerful command from Jesus: "Come out!"

And be restored to life. With God's help and Jesus' love we can do just that.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.