

April 29, 2018 (Fourth Sunday of Easter)

John 11:38-44

Emerge “Unwrapping: Community Response and Unfolding:
New Possibilities”

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This story of Lazarus could have been on reality TV,
if it was around back then. Why do I say that?
Not because it is outlandishly outrageous, but rather, it is
reality TV, because it lives up to its name – this is our reality!
The story of Lazarus is our story through and through.

In order for us to fully get the breadth and depth of this story
we need to look at the entire 44 verses of this morning’s
reading. Don’t worry I’ll do it expediently.

Here goes:

Lazarus was sick. So, his sisters (Mary and Martha) sent a
message to Jesus with the barb, “You know the one you love is
sick.” When he gets the word he replies, “It’s not gonna kill
him. Rather, the whole thing will be to the glory of God.”

Sometimes we think that what we are going through is going to
kill us. Yet, Jesus can be heard to respond to our words, “it’s
not gonna kill you, the whole thing (the whole thing, all of it)
will be used for the glory of God!

Then, Jesus stayed in place for two days, and then tells his
disciples he is heading out. At which time, they remind warn
him that there was trouble for him Bethany not long ago, for
they tried to stone Jesus there. Yet, Jesus assures them that
there is darkness there (Lazarus in the tomb) and Jesus must
go and bring the light to him.

When darkness is all that we can see, we too must hold onto the reality that Jesus will come to us, bringing the light – illuminating our situation and enlightening us to the reality that there is still a future ahead of us, this is not the end. In God's eyes, we are not done in, nor is God done with unwrapping and unfolding the plan and future good God has for us. Jesus is there to wake Lazarus up and us too, from our the state we are in, to the state God has called us to be – fully awake and alive!

Next, we get the word in this reality TV episode that Lazarus has been dead four days once Jesus arrives. Bad things happen to good people, and it stinks. This is their cold, empty, dark reality.

It is our reality too at times, and to the why, I don't know if there is a satisfying and full explanation. I have not found one that gives me total peace, so in the meantime, I work on trusting God, that it will all make sense one day, though I have concluded, probably not this side of heaven.

Next comes the blame game, and with it comes often the additional players of anger and sadness arrives too– Mary was one, and Martha was the other. Each blamed someone else Martha said it's your fault Jesus, you didn't come, and Mary did the same. One yelled and the other cried.

Done both, you too I'm sure. When tragedy strikes we look for someone to blame. If you had... then... We too seethe, or scream out in our pain, or explode because it hurts so much to keep it in. We too draw into ourselves, and become quiet, desiring to be with no one, nor wanting to talk to anyone, and when we do find the courage to do so, we often cry.

Notice, Jesus does not shut down Martha's angry blast, nor curtail Mary's curdling cries. He just says, follow me. He talks with her and gives her information about what is really true despite what she appears to see. Then, he says, let's go to the tomb, because there is more to this story than you have seen to date. There is more to be revealed. No matter where we are in regard to being in the darkness or believing in the resurrection (and by that I mean our own resurrection), Jesus invites us to come and see, so we can finally wake up to the truth, the reality of what God has for our life. If our life would have just turned out as we thought, or planned; then we would have never grown, and stretched and trusted, and possibly never taken flight, but rather just laid there in the dark, dead to the world, and dead to ourselves. Where the tomb would be the last place we were. Rather, than the open air and fresh breeze of a new day, with endless possibilities being given to us by God.

Up to this point, it had been all about Lazarus and Jesus, as it should have been. Yet, the journey of faith as a follower of Christ, does not just end with you and Jesus and me and Jesus.

Rather, the next episode of this unfolding story and our story, is that Jesus chose to use community for the completion of Lazarus resurrection story and us.

One a bad day, I think, "Jesus, could you not have picked a more efficient way, a more sure-fire way, than the Church to get done what you want done, for we are known to be flawed and make mistakes." Yet, when all is said and done, who am I, that I think I know better than God, on how to bring about a complete resurrection.

It begins with Jesus instruction to those near the tomb to roll the stone away. In other words, I am getting ready to call him

to “Come out”, and that darn stone is in the way. Move that obstacle.

What are the stone cold realities that block our way from resurrection that must be rolled away, if we are to rise to our fullness in God? Let me just say, that the Church has put some of those stones in place, and now needs to roll some of those stones away. Like when it told or tells people:

You are not worthy of God’s love, only God’s anger,
You are a sinner, don’t dress it up, that’s what you are, nothing more.

You have not followed the rules and God hates rule breakers,
You messed up and truth be told you are nothing but a mess,
You sitting over there, no you can’t sit there.

Be quiet, rather, shut up woman, God only utilizes men.

Get out, your kind aren’t welcome here.

The obstacles of race, class, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and “disabilities” have attempted to block the resurrection of many, and the Church has done that. “Lord, forgive the Church, give us a heart and will to now do right.” Amen?

Reality TV, shows there are many stones that have been rolled in front of people tombs and these obstacles have caused them to die there without ever emerging, much less experiencing resurrection. Yet, the other reality is, Jesus came to raise people from the dead, for it was an absolutely essential part of his mission. And for us to partake in that mission, we must be willing to roll the stones away that have been confining and killing to others. For God’s purpose is not that people die, but rather awake and become fully alive. So, for the Church (with a capital C) to do that, it must be willing to put to death some of the wrongful perceptions about God, and about who God loves,

and who God will use. The truth is – God will use everyone who desire to “come out” from under all that stinks of death.

Lastly, the community needed to unwrap Lazarus. After Jesus yelled for him to “come out” and he did, he was still a bit tied up.

We can let people be encumbered or we can help them get unwrapped and free, so they can spread their wings and reach new heights. The leaving each other all wrapped up in all kinds of stuff, must stop, if the Church is going to be the Church of Jesus Christ. We must aid one another by giving each other freedom, to be all we are, so that we can reach those new heights and be all we can be. Let’s not tie ourselves or each other up in knots, but loosen all that keeps us from being our true, authentic selves, unique by God’s design, appointed to do great and amazing things in this world.

“Let him go.” Is the last thing Jesus said in this story. Yet, I have a distinct feeling that this was not even close to the ending of Lazarus story, but more like a new beginning, or the next season of a person who could not be kept down, nor buried 6 foot under.

Going is our destiny. Not lying down or being blocked, or just sitting there, but rather being on the move.

What will you do with your resurrection?

Go, go – for there are new possibilities before you, and thus I can’t wait to see the next episode of the story of your life on reality TV.