

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Fifth Sunday of Lent: March 26, 2023

The Lazarus Connection

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the fifth and last Sunday of Lent. Today we hear the story of Lazarus' resurrection, a foretelling of what lay in store for Jesus. What we must realize, is this is the last miracle the ruling religious leaders were going to put up with. They had enough of this so-called Messiah. And truthfully, Jesus was telling them to their faces that he had the power of God, the power over the living and the dead.

Let us imagine Jesus, a man who is stirring up the countryside and seemingly mocking the religious leaders of his time, not on purpose, but by purely loving people. Healing people of their issues and burdens should not be a crime, but it showed the inadequacy of a faith gone stale, and the corruption of a politically bought and sold system of repression. The Jewish people of the time had lost their true connection to God.

And if we are to place God within Jesus, we see that Jesus becomes emotional in many ways and for various reasons. Jesus experiences the grief of a close friend, just as you and I do, but Jesus also models to those around him that death is not a finality and that God has the last say over death, as we can see by the dialogue

presented in the Gospel. For the Jews of that time, there was already a hope of an afterlife brewing within the faith community.

So, we learn in this text that God can and does have an emotional connection to his creation. And although we are mortal on this side of God's realm, this state of impermanence (mortality is just that) is a temporary state experienced by the immortal being that we originally were when created by God.

But you can imagine the fury of those in power. Because now there was a man who had experienced death, and was raised from having a stench-ridden, dead body, into a man proclaiming Jesus as Lord. News traveled fast and to those in power, Lazarus and Jesus were now targets of the Temple priests. These two agitators to the way things had always been, needed to go. They were losing control, which (as religion has often done) was using the fear of God for power and profit.

From the economic and social perspective, as far as one can tell from these stories, Mary and Martha were attached to Lazarus and should he die, they were women who, without a male figure in their life, would have no support. They would probably have no place to live, and like the Samaritan woman at the well, may need to find another man, or husband, or father figure to survive. So again, Jesus has upturned the system in an economic way, which would seem to tell the authorities, that the system can and should be

overturned. Imagine God, overturned by the simple tears and prayers of women.

And then there is the possible connection to Mary pouring the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. This was one of the last acts of grace given to Jesus - probably out of thanksgiving for raising her brother Lazarus. Again, a minute but clear economic exchange as Jesus accepts the anointing and rebukes the disciples for any financial complaints that come up.

Lastly, there is the question, whatever happened to Lazarus? Well, in case you were in suspense or thinking he was immortal and walking the earth, all scholars agree, Lazarus died a second time. I can tell you from my hospice experience, people usually don't like to go through the dying process more than once.

Although the Bible doesn't give us any further information about Lazarus there are some church history records that may or may not be accurate. Some say Lazarus was killed shortly after he was raised by religious authorities who wanted him dead.

Other accounts state that Lazarus and his sisters moved to Cyprus where Lazarus became the Bishop of Kition and died of natural causes around 63 AD. Others claim Lazarus and his sisters moved to Gaul to preach the gospel and they again speak of Lazarus as a Bishop in Marseilles where he was martyred, by being beheaded

under the Emperor Domitian. But what we know for sure is that Lazarus died a second mortal death and was raised again from the dead to join all God's saints in eternity.

Jesus has shown us today that death has no power over him. And today, just like the disciples, we often don't really register that message but instead cling to things that will not last.

So I read again the words of Oscar Romero because they cannot be said frequently enough.

The prophet was not deceived. Something began to change on earth when Christ appeared in those lands curing the sick, raising the dead, preaching to the poor, bringing hope to the people. It was like when a stone is cast into a quiet lake – ripples appear, and they spread until they reach the shores. Christ appeared and he broke the oppressive yokes, he brought joy to the hearts of people, and he sowed hope in their hearts. This is what God is doing now in history.

This is what God is doing now in history, and you are a part of it, because the fear of God, I hope this season, has been replaced by a forgiving merciful, and grace giving God, because even death has no sting anymore. Amen