

April 2, 2017

Story of Lazarus – For God's Glory

## PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

## SERMON

It's a little hard for me to believe that we've come so far into Lent. That we're just two weeks away from this celebration of Easter. As we've gone through each Sunday we've seen conversations that Jesus had with different individuals. Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the talk of living in the Spirit, of new birth. All of us hearing that and knowing that it's leading us to the great celebration of Easter. When we will be celebrating the resurrection of Christ himself. But for these folks that were participating in Jesus' ministry, all these things were new. All these things probably caused as many questions as it gave answers. And they were witnessing and trying to understand all this talk about Spirit and life. About resurrection, about new life, being reborn. About receiving signs and this being the power of God working in this man.

It makes me wonder if some of them did reflect back on Ezekiel. His vision, his image of death of the people of God. Because that's how they saw themselves at that time. They felt as if they were apart from God. And that's what death truly is. Living is being in a relationship with God, death then is being separated from God. And the people who have been chosen to be God's people were feeling as though they had separated themselves from God because the prophets were coming up and saying it's time to repent, it's time to turn around. You have gone astray. And they thought God had left them and they felt as if they were dead, lost. Alone. And yet, God raises up his prophets to tell them that God will give life again. That what is born of flesh is flesh but what is born of Spirit is Spirit. And now God is going to give them a new life. God is calling them to something new. God will bring them life again.

A little different then it was before. He will take the remnants of those dry bones, he will bring them together. He will build his people again and then he will breathe on them. The breath of God is the Spirit of God. It is that breath that moved over that void in creation. It is that breath that gives life not born of flesh but born of the Spirit. They were receiving a vision of what was to come. When Jesus came and when he would give his life so that all, not just those chosen people, but all could receive new life. Life in and of the Spirit of God.

We have the story in the gospel of Lazarus. Now we already know that Jesus was friends with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. We hear a couple of different stories of him interacting with that family. Martha and Mary have a feel for just who Jesus is. They are followers, they are disciples. They believe that in him they see the Messiah. Certainly, they if not have witnessed, have heard the stories of people being at the point of death being brought to Jesus. And by a touch or by a word, they are given life again. They are healed, they are made whole. And so, when their dear brother Lazarus is very sick, they send someone to find Jesus. Go from Bethany which is right outside of Jerusalem, travel north to where Jesus is doing his teaching in the area of Galilee.

They find him and they tell him. Now this takes a couple of days. You don't just walk up to Galilee in a day from Jerusalem or Bethany. Takes a couple of days to get up there. They find Jesus. Jesus, the one that you love, Lazarus is ill. Probably telling him, we believe he is at that point of death. And Jesus, they had to have been expecting oh well let's go now we need to take care of this. Or even you know by word he will be okay, he will be healed. Thanks for letting me know. This is taken care of. That was probably their expectation. And I have a feeling that they were completely underwhelmed by Jesus' response.

He said okay. Thanks for letting me know. You can go back now. The disciples were probably surprised too. Or probably felt that by word, by the thought, by who he was Lazarus was going to be made well. They may not had been surprised that he didn't hurry and travel back down there. They probably weren't since the Jews just had been trying to stone him. He's probably doing this long distance. And then a couple of days later, well guys Lazarus has fallen asleep it's time for us to go down to Jerusalem. Oh but Jesus, Jesus he's going to be okay right, that's how this works. Said you know guys you don't understand. He's dead. Oh well you know why didn't you take care of that Jesus. Because this is for God's glory.

Sounds very familiar. If you were here last Sunday, when Jesus was introduced to the man born blind. The disciples asked the question, well who sinned his parents or this man that he was born blind. And Jesus' response was neither. He was born blind so that God's glory could be shone. God's power could be shone. Says basically the same thing about Lazarus. This is so I'm glad you weren't there so that you would know the glory and power of God to give life. That that's God's desire. For the people of God, for all people to have life. And now we're going to go down and give you a preview of life that is coming for everybody. Let's go down.

At least Thomas wasn't real thrilled about the idea. Remember they were just trying to stone you down there. Are you sure this is the best course of action? If he's dead, there's nothing you can do right? And he tells the rest of the disciples, well he's got his mind set on that. Let's go down and die with him. Not the most optimistic of disciples. And so, they go. And Martha hears that they have come down finally. You know that she was wondering why didn't you do something? Why did this have to happen? Why didn't he come when we called? Why didn't he use his power that he's used to heal others before? Why not? He loved Lazarus. They were friends.

And he has the power, why? She runs out to where he is. Lord if you would have only been here, my brother wouldn't have died. And again, he gives a relatively strange response. He will live again. Do you believe that? Well you know I know he's going to be raised on the last day, the day of resurrection. I've listened to your teaching. I got that much. You know I'm not sure how that's going to be accomplished but it gives some hope. But that doesn't take away the pain now. It doesn't take away the idea that you could have saved his life. He could've lived on at least for a while longer. Well don't you realize I am the resurrection, that's what all this is about. I'm bringing it, but it's not just resurrection on the last day but resurrection to a new life of Spirit. And I'm going to show you what that's all about.

So, she goes and gets Mary. Mary comes out and she's in that same place that Martha was. Lord if you had been here, he wouldn't have died. She had been weeping and the people that were there to console her they came out too because they thought she was going to the

tomb to weep, to mourn, to cry. And they were going to cry and weep with her. That's what they do in Israel. If you ever been there and you've ever seen how a mourning process goes in Israel. They wail, they scream, they lament, they cry together. Because it's a loss. It's an ending. They feel fractured, they feel as though an ending has come without any further story.

And Jesus is moved. He has disturbed in Spirit the humanity of Jesus. He understands where they are. They don't understand that new life is coming. They're not there yet. Even Martha and Mary don't fully understand. And he feels the finality that they are feeling. That this relationship that they had with Lazarus is gone forever. That finality of death was all that they had at that point. Not truly understanding what the resurrection was going to be about.

And so, when it says that Jesus wept. It wasn't that he was weeping for Lazarus. He knew what he was going to do for Lazarus. He knew that Lazarus would come out of the tomb. That he would have life again briefly perhaps. We don't know how long he lived after he was resuscitated and joined the group again. I'm not sure it was a great favor to have to face death a second time but here he was. He knew, Jesus knew what he was going to do. But he was moved by the finality of death itself for the people. Not knowing, not understanding the gift that was about to come as he completed his work in the world.

As he went through the passion. As he went to the cross. As he died for the sins of others, so that our sins could be forgiven so that we could be reconciled to God. And be raised to new life now and forever. He wept for that feeling of finality that they were suffering. So, they come to the tomb, take away the rock. Call Lazarus out. Life again, people are amazed and they begin to believe. They begin to believe that in Jesus is an answer to death. That in Jesus there is a new hope for life that does not end. Where we don't have to say goodbye forever. The finality of death is being taken away.

They don't fully understand it yet. He hasn't gone through the passion. He hasn't gone through the crucifixion. He certainly hasn't been raised from the dead yet. But they begin to believe. That in him is life in the Spirit and that life is given by God. And only God could take that away and God is not inclined to do that. God wants us to have life. God wants us to have life with God.

And that is the great gift that we will be celebrating in two weeks. When Jesus has completed being obedient to the will of God. The humanity of Jesus, obedient to the divinity of Jesus, going through the passion. Going through death, lying in the tomb. Going to the dead. Offering the gift of life, offering the gift of forgiveness. Offering the gift of reconciliation. The gift that we have been offered as well. The gift that we have accepted. So, that death is not that final statement anymore.

It is become a transition. With those who have begun to live as citizens of the kingdom of God are transitioned from this life into the fullness of God's kingdom. That is what we will be celebrating in two weeks. Martha and Mary, Lazarus, the people at the tomb, they all saw a glimpse of what was to be. It is a reminder from where we have come from. Where death was the final statement. To living a life now where death has become that transition. With a life that we have begun in God's kingdom now will be completed. Where we will be reunited with those who we have loved, and lived with, and shared with. Who have been taken from

us physically but have continued to be with us in Spirit. We will rejoin them in Spirit. That is God's gift to us. Life in God's spirit.