

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last week, we heard Jesus giving sight to the blind man...who told his own story to the Pharisees. And they, because of their own blindness, threw the man out of the temple. We get the part of giving sight to the blind man, but what does that mean to us? For us, the real point is how the blind man “saw the light” of Jesus, if you will...and how that led him to “BE” the light himself. How do WE see what it means to see?

This week, we have more of the same, but even more dramatic. More incredible. Raising Lazarus from the dead. We say to ourselves, “There are all kinds of conflicting things going on here. I do not get it. What is the point of this?”

It is so confusing. As the theologian Marcus Borg points out, the Bible...and particularly the New Testament...almost never talks about life after death. Jesus was asked, “Is there life after death?”...and he replies, “I do not know, but is there life before death?”

“I came so that you might have life, and have it abundantly.”

OK, we have enough trouble with figuring out the life/death definitions and meanings of Jesus, and here is the Lazarus story. Jesus resuscitates a very dear, but very dead friend. But why? Or, better yet....why should we care? Factually and historically, it was a one-time event. Jesus himself, in the flesh, does this one time to Lazarus, and one time only. In fact, this event...for the Jewish authorities..is the straw that breaks the camel’s back. It directly sets in motion the drama that cause the death of Jesus himself only days later.

Lazarus will still die a death of his earthly body, and God....through Jesus...was saving him from that only for the time-being. Again....for us....so what? What does this story mean for **my** life, or yours?

Was this just a magic show? Is not that the image we...and the rest of the post modern world are left with? Remember, this is the age before modern medical science and the resulting treatments, technology, and medications. But, c’mon...Lazarus has been dead for **days**...not minutes. The thing that is comparable today is being in a coma...a comatose state. Being on life support. If the plug is pulled, there is no sign of life.

What was the point of Jesus doing miracles? When Jesus performed a miracle, those witnessing the miracles saw the suspending of physical laws of nature that showed a miraculous change in the physical world. But, why? If you believe that he did them, why did he?

Enough of the questions, you think. Where are the answers? Like the blind man, we need the miracle of God through Jesus to SEE the miracles in OUR lives. The great challenge of preachers

everywhere.

In this story, Martha and Mary get us in focus as witnesses to this story because they know Jesus and trust him. God empowers Jesus to raise Lazarus....not so much as to resurrect Lazarus. And even not so much to show people who Jesus is. But rather to show what God can do through the faith of someone like Jesus...the one who shows us the way.

This story is about what God can do through faith. It is shared NOT as a history lesson about Lazarus, but rather as a vision...for us to see. To finally be rid of our blindness, so that we can see God..like we did last week...and now, in God through Jesus...NOW to be, and do, and live in God's presence.

This story about Lazarus being raised from the dead is really about God raising us from the dead.

Again, Jesus was not about life after death, but rather life before death. Life before death.

It is about seeing God, and seeing God in the present. It is about being present in the present.

By the grace of God, I am present in the present by admitting to you that I love this congregation. For that reason, I keep putting questions before you, week after week, with the heart-felt hope and prayer that you, along with me, will...during the week in between...will continue to try. Try seeing differently. Try asking continually.

But the time of life is too short. There is no time to put it off. That is the single, greatest message of Jesus. We were born, each of us, to live life with God in the present...and almost all of us put it off until tomorrow. We worry about everything, and particularly worry about tomorrow...but we do not, and cannot have tomorrow. We only have today. Jesus says that outright: we cannot add a single hour to our lives by worrying. If we cannot do as little as that, then why bother worrying about the rest?

Repent. Change your heart and your focus. Look for, and find God, in the present.

"I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly."

We want Jesus to snap his fingers at the beginning of this story and bring Lazarus back to life right away and not have Martha and Mary suffer in the way that they did waiting for him. But we, like those in Bethany, must allow God to work through time, pain, and our own limited understanding to bring about resurrection. This story gives us so much time to stew because, in this account of Jesus and Lazarus, God indicates to us how much we need God.

Raising Lazarus from the dead is really an invitation to us into a whole new orientation to life and death. Toward participation into a miracle of human transformation that would not be complete until his own death and resurrection. It is freedom from our "Being-toward-death" into a "Being-toward-life." It is about living in God's culture. Not tomorrow. Not when we are dead and in heaven...but God wants it for us now. That was the life and ministry of Jesus. Finding and being present with God...in the present.

Early in this ministry, I was called to Hamilton hospital to administer final rites for a young man, 18 or so, a motorcycle accident victim. There was yelling and cursing in the parking lot by a young male friend or relative upon the news of his passing. I reflect now, in my journey with God, that much of that anger and pain was over their unfinished relationship.

My father was the greatest man I ever knew. Cleared jungles in the Amazon during World War II for the war effort. Was a first-rate dreamer and believer in personal courage and hard work. Flying around the world for Pan American Airlines in the dawn of international aviation travel. Dropping everything to take on the completely unknown task of running a railroad as a family business. When my mother died, he was alone and slowly becoming confined to a wheel chair. It was a four hour trip each way for me every other weekend, and I could not keep it up...so for two years I continually urged to move him up north with me, either in my big home, or next door, which was for sale. He continued to refuse, for whatever reasons, and I got my Irish up finally, in saying that I have asked you, for two long years, to come be with me, and I will not ask you again.

We were estranged when he died...and I suppose he, and my Aunt Norma, thought that I was angry. The truth was, and is, that I love my father so much that my heart did not have the strength to see him dwindle and erode away. I could not continue to make that trip, but he did not know why...and he died before I could tell him. I did not take advantage of the present that God gave me to tell my dad the truth of how heart-sick I was with his stubbornness, or his fear, or whatever it was. But God is transforming me so that I have learned from that. That is what repentance means. What salvation means. What being "re-born" means. So I have learned from that to tell you, people that I love in Christ, so that you may drop your blindness..and now live by finding and seeing God in the present.

Jesus loved Lazarus as well, and perhaps he died before Jesus could tell him, and God answered his prayer. Then and now...this is the story of new life, through the power of God.

"Eternal life" does not just happen to us after we die, but starts the instant we begin to experience the Resurrection and begin the journey of becoming "Beings-toward-life.", of starting to live in the light of the Resurrection. Jesus today says "Unbind him, and let him go", a sign for what Jesus has been trying to do for all of his followers, unbinding us from death's hold on our lives.

By nature, we are bi-polar about death. In its most obvious form...physical death...we fear it. Avoid it, because it signifies the end of what we know. But, what about the other forms of death? The other forms of death that keep us from living now in the way that God intends for us. Us....made in the very image of God at the very moment of our conception, to be the very children of God.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is actually a small sample of the almighty power of God to

transform. If God brought a corpse back to a living being before the advent of modern science, it was for the purpose of showing both God's desire for us to live...in all the definitions of **life**...as well as God's almighty power to make that desire happen, through miracles if need be.

It **is** a miracle from God that we discern this: Jesus **is** the resurrection and the life. Yet that rebirth into new life is for now...while our hearts are beating, while our lungs are breathing, while we are here.. in the flesh..to both act upon and enjoy the life...here and now...that God blesses us with.

We repent in Lent...and Lent is almost over. But repentance is not a goal, an end line...but rather a change of direction. And we are changing directions here...beginning anew the journey, and the individual focus..by the grace and help of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to be transformed into living children of God, and not in name only.

That we find and have life before death...and have it now.

That we are born to make manifest the glory of God within us, and will begin to live shamelessly into the fullness of our holy image.

The holy image of the loving and eternal God revealed to us in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Amen.