

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt  
Fifth Sunday in Lent - Year A  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Psalm 130  
Romans 8:6-11  
John 11:1-45  
03/26/2023

### **Gospel**

*\*The congregation may be seated\**

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

<sup>1</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup>But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."  
<sup>5</sup>Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup>after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup>Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup>The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" <sup>9</sup>Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup>But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." <sup>11</sup>After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him."  
<sup>12</sup>The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all

right.” 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” 17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” 23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” 28When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the

Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

The Gospel of our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **People**

Good morning! On February 20th, 1987 Gary Wright, a computer store owner, went outside to look at a package that an employee saw someone leave near the building. What Gary didn't know was that he was about to become another in the long list of victims from the Unabomber's

domestic terrorism. Gary ended up being lucky, losing a few fingers and suffering “only” nerve damage to the left arm. After Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, was finally caught, his brother David felt compelled to reach out to his brother’s victims. It was a phone call with Gary where something unique was created. Out of all the pain, all the misguided hate and anger of Ted towards the world, his brother David and Gary were able to forge a friendship that still stands to this day, 35 years later. They have traveled and spoken together, showing to the world that it is our ability to FORM connections, not destroy them, that is our greatest strength.

It’s the relationships that I want to focus on in today’s Gospel lesson. It was the words of scholar Jennifer Garcia Bashaw that sent me down this path. She writes *“The story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is a climactic one in the Gospel of John, in several aspects. First, it is an emotional and relational climax for Jesus. If you were to peruse the story for emotional and relational terms (which is good interpretive practice to do with any passage), you would find the following descriptions: ‘he whom you love’ (the sisters write to Jesus in 11:3), ‘Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus’ (11:5), ‘our friend’ (Jesus says about Lazarus in 11:11), console/consoling (11:19 and 11:31), weeping (the Jews, Mary, and Jesus in 11:31-35, [Jesus] was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved’ (11:33), and ‘See, how he loved him!’ (The Jews say of Jesus in 11:36). The whole passage is saturated with emotional responses and although such expression would not be uncommon in Jewish funeral practices, the fact that John uses the affective demonstrations from the beginning of the chapter (well before the scene at the tomb) is significant.”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-in-lent/commentary-on-john-111-45-7>

It's easy to get caught up in the supernatural of the whole story. Believe me, I get it. I'm just as curious as you are, and at another time, maybe I will go into the details, but it's so easy to get caught up in the otherworldly details of the story's ending that we often miss the rest of the tale. In the whole 45 verses of our Gospel reading the re-animation only takes about 5 verses. And so, it's the rest of the story I think we should try and focus on today.

I don't think we realize how significant this story is, given its place in the larger narrative. It's the events of this passage that directly lead the Jewish leadership to take steps to have Jesus killed. The story marks the roughly halfway point in the Gospel. From here Jesus heads to Jerusalem where he gives his lengthy final lessons and his journey to the cross. And as I said two weeks ago, the Gospel of John is characterized by LENGTHY teachings from Jesus where others get very few words in edgewise. But what we see here is a long tale with several different people, all of whom play an important role.

When Jesus decides to go to Judea, he knows he's walking to his death. To go back that close to Jerusalem means that he gets closer to the reach of those in power. The disciples know this too, for all their mistakes and failings, they follow him faithfully towards that uncertain future. Because, for both Jesus and the disciples, the relationships that have formed compel them to act.

Now this is purely speculative, but it makes me wonder what was on God's mind at the time. Sure, God is all knowing, but there is a difference between knowing something and FEELING something. Do you think God had any idea the way that relationships would affect God when God became flesh? Sure, I bet God knew that strong feelings and emotional bonds would

form, but again, thinking and feeling are very different realities. Again, Bashaw hits it out of the park when she writes *“But here, Jesus loves his dear friends, is deeply moved, and even weeps. There is arguably no other scene in the Gospels where Jesus is as relationally and emotionally connected to people as in John 11. As the story moves on from here, Jesus’ interactions with his disciples show increasingly more relationality and affection (specifically in the foot washing scene in chapter 13 and in Jesus’ farewell address). This chapter seems to serve as a catalyst for Jesus opening himself up more to humanity.”*

That’s why the church has always been so important to me. My strongest relationships were formed because of the ways we grew together, learning about our faith, all the while growing in both knowledge and love. Ted Kacynski is proof that we can’t do it alone. There was a man of genius level intelligence, he scored something like 187 on the I.Q. test. But all alone on that mountain in Utah he had no-one with whom to grow and love.

Now let me be clear, I’m not saying that intelligence is a bad thing, or that we should react purely on emotion. But what I am saying is that it is never enough to walk this road alone. We need friends, partners, loved ones. They challenge us, in much the same way as Martha and Mary challenged Jesus. Take Martha’s confession. “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Our relationships take statements like that and turn them into living realities before our very eyes.

In our pursuit of the vocation that God has called each and every one of us to, let us never forget that it’s the people all around us God had ALSO called us towards. We are never alone, a family of believers united under a God who has been in our shoes, who has felt our pain, and who refused to let it stand. Amen.