

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church  
 Sermon: Don't just believe it—believe Him!  
 Scripture: John 11:1-44  
 Rev. Steve Filyk  
 March 1, 2026  
 Opener: Holy, holy, holy  
 Choruses: Living Hope (Wickham) & We Fall Down  
 Communion: In Christ Alone  
 Closer: And can it be

Today we'll move back and forth between Scripture and commentary,  
 so we can follow this important but longer story.

Before we begin, I want to set the table  
 With the narrative and geographical context  
 Of today's story from the Gospel of John.

After his healing of the man born blind  
 And his teaching on the Good Shepherd,  
 Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Festival of Dedication.

While he was there, Jesus' opponents pressed him  
 To clearly make a definitive statement  
 about whether or not he was the Messiah.  
 When Jesus declared "I and the Father are one"  
 they tried to stone him for blasphemy.

But Jesus escaped and went east across the Jordan  
 To the place where John the Baptist had previously been baptising,  
 Maybe that place called Bethany-East-of-the-Jordan.

If we think of John the Baptist's austere life  
 We can imagine Jesus' time away  
 as a desert retreat for refocusing.

Bible scholar Tom Wright suggests that it was in this place  
 That Jesus was offering prayers for Lazarus  
 and all that would follow.  
 [NT Wright John for Everyone: Part 2, 15]

Jesus might have been in Bethany-East-of-the-Jordan  
 but today's story will take us to another Bethany  
 on the west side of the Jordan, west of Jerusalem.  
 Getting to this other Bethany  
 would demand travelling back through the city.

Let's hear the first part of today's reading:  
 FIRST READING John 11:1-16.

Perhaps the most astonishing feature of this first section  
 is what we might call a love that delays  
 We hear the following:  
 "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.  
 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick,  
 [Jesus] stayed where he was two more days..."

Jesus' delay is not the expected behavior of someone  
 who cares for another person, another family.  
 When we hear about an emergency or illness  
 We jump into some sort of action.  
 We get into our cars, or communicate our concern.

But when Jesus hears that his beloved friend Lazarus is sick  
 He doesn't go anywhere or do anything.  
 He simply delays.

This behavior seems odd but is clarified in what follows.  
 Jesus knows that Lazarus' sickness will not end with tragedy.  
 Lazarus' death will provide an opportunity to reveal God's glory,  
 And an opportunity to foster belief.

By delaying Jesus is creating an opportunity  
for something more than an ordinary healing.  
And with a longer delay  
Jesus is removing all doubt that Lazarus is truly dead.

Writings from after Jesus' day note the "rabbinic belief  
that the soul hovers over the body of the deceased person  
for the first three days, 'intending to re-enter it,  
but as soon as it sees its appearance change' ... it departs..."  
[DA Carson The Gospel According to John 411]

Jesus doesn't return until four days have past.  
By then everyone will be certain that Lazarus is truly dead.

Let's continue with the second part our reading:  
SECOND READING John 11:17-37 The Lord enters our grief

The second section  
Reveals two more astonishing features of our story.  
First there is that discussion between Martha and Jesus  
About the resurrection.

When Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise again  
Martha confirms that she believes in the resurrection  
At the end of time.

Some Jews, particularly the Sadducees,  
didn't believe in a future resurrection,  
but at this period most Jews did...  
[it was] a vision of new heavens and anew earth...  
new bodies, to share and relish the life of new creation.  
[NT Wright John for Everyone: Part 2, 7]

But when Martha declares her trust in this doctrine,  
Jesus invites her to stretch her faith  
and place that trust, that confidence in him.  
Jesus tells her: "I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live,  
Even though they die; and whoever lives  
By believing in me will never die."

Jesus invites her to move from belief in a doctrine  
to trusting the One who stands in front of her.  
Jesus is inviting her into a faith that is relational.

As we are taught elsewhere in the Gospel of John  
when it comes to the sharing in the divine life,  
[A life that begins now and stretches into heaven]  
It is not how much you know, but who you know,  
That is crucial.

This is the first astonishing lesson.  
The second astonishing lesson of this section  
Is the way Jesus enters into the family's grief.

Despite his knowledge that Lazarus  
Will be raised back to life,  
When Jesus encounters a broken Mary  
he was 'moved in spirit and troubled'.  
We are told that 'Jesus wept.'

This is not a detached philosopher's god.  
This is the God who stands beside a grieving sister  
and weeps with her.

Wright argues that "Only when we stop and ponder this  
will we understand the full mystery of John's gospel.  
Only when we put away our high-and-dry pictures of who God is  
and replace them with pictures in which  
the Word who is God  
can cry with the world's crying  
will we discover what the word 'God' really means.  
[NT Wright John for Everyone: Part 2, 11]

Let's move on to the final section:  
John 11:38-44 The Lord who calls the dead to life.

Having experience a Lord who delays  
And enters our grief, we now meet the most astonishing  
Feature of this story in the Lord who calls the dead to life.

Martha had confessed her belief  
That Jesus himself is the resurrection and the life,  
But this trust wobbles when Jesus asks for the stone  
To be removed from Lazarus' tomb.

In the Middle East bodies were buried quickly  
as the warm climate hastens decomposition.  
There was no embalming like they did in Egypt  
And there were no cadaver coolers like in our modern age.

If you opened a tomb four days after burial,  
the spices placed around the body  
would be overpowered by the stench.

Martha warns Jesus, but he tells her to trust him.  
The stone is removed.  
Jesus prays.  
And the Jesus shouts:  
"Lazarus, come out!"

And the dead man comes alive  
crawling out of the tomb.  
Jesus then directs the onlookers  
to help him get out of his graveclothes.

We often speak of the 'resurrection' of Lazarus  
But it is better understood as being restored back to a life  
With its familiar limitations.

Lazarus would age,  
be prone to sickness and disease,  
and eventually die like everyone else.

Resurrection on the other hand, is life 2.0.  
is a new sort of life seen only so far in Jesus,  
a life that is profoundly different and will never end.

But coming back to life like Lazarus  
is itself an amazing sign and incredible miracle.  
It serves as the last and greatest sign Jesus performs in the Gospel  
Before his final work of defeating death.

And it is this sign moves Jesus' mission forward.  
The sign provokes belief among the people.  
And because of that belief the Pharisees and chief priests  
conspire to kill him.

So what are we to make of today's story.  
What are our take-aways?

I can think of at least three.  
First of all it becomes clear  
That Jesus takes the long view  
prioritizing eternal life over temporary relief.  
Yes Jesus is concerned with our bodies.  
He tells us if we are sick  
we should ask our church elders to pray for healing.  
[Something that will be available after the service].

But beyond our health and comfort  
Jesus wants each of us to know him, to trust him,  
And discover a new life that stretches into eternity.

But what is the sort of trust or belief that he is looking for?

Here's my second take-away:

Jesus is interested relationship, not just religion —  
not merely concepts and correct ideas, but a living trust.

Jesus doesn't want Martha to believe  
in resurrection as a distant, theoretical possibility,  
But wants her to encounter it in himself as a person.

You can know your Bibles inside out,  
And you can know a lot ABOUT God,  
But Jesus wants us to know God.  
Jesus wants us to meet him in a relationship.

Finally and this is my third take-away,  
The community is invited to share in Jesus' work of restoration.  
Jesus didn't roll that stone away from Lazarus' tomb  
And he didn't help him get freed from those bands of cloth  
That were his graveclothes.  
Jesus invites his followers to participate in his work.

Yesterday afternoon a number of us walked in support of the Mustard Seed.  
Some of you contributed to this fundraiser.  
The Mustard Seed is interested in holistic healing:  
Body, soul, spirit.  
For those who are homeless or addicted this will require a miracle.  
But when God is working miracles he needs human hands ready to help.

So let me leave you with three questions.

Where might God be accomplishing long-term work  
amidst your own suffering?

Where have you been trusting in doctrine  
and yet resisting relationship?

Where might Jesus be asking you  
to help someone who is being brought back to life?

May we see the signs that God is accomplishing among us.  
And may we truly believe.

Amen.