

**This morning in our Gospel lesson we hear the story of Lazarus from Saint John.**

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." <sup>13</sup>Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup>For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup>Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

<sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

<sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup>She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

<sup>8</sup>When 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.” <sup>29</sup>And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>The 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. <sup>32</sup>When 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.”

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, “See how he loved

him!”<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus 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.” <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup> I 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.”

<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup> The 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.”

<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

### **This is the Good news of Christ – praise to you O God.**

Grace and peace to you all from God – our strength and our redeemer – Amen.

Through the story of Lazarus’s death and raising we are reminded that even Jesus – God with us – was deeply disturbed by our world’s suffering and pain. He openly wept, he took time to grieve, and he held space for the sadness and fear of those around him. And perhaps most importantly, he chose to do so knowing full well that his journey to be

with those who needed him the most would at times be hard and dangerous.

Never the less, Jesus and his disciples still returned to tend to the needs of his friends out a deep love for them and their community. And I can't help but think that Christ returned because he knew that all of God's children need community, connection, and tangible signs of hope in the midst of their despair.

After all, aren't connection, community, and tangible signs of hope the very things we have all been searching for this week?

In our communications over phone, text, and zoom this week it hasn't taken long for many of us to name just how hard and isolating this pandemic has been.

In the blink of an eye, many of us have lost our sense of normalcy, our daily independence, our financial security, and even our sense of physical connection with our wider world. And as we each come to terms with these losses - we are beginning to name them in our own way.

I read a helpful article this week by Scott (*Ber-in-a-to*) called "*That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief*" - in it he identified some of our feelings around these losses and potential future hurts as *anticipatory grief*.

It's a kind of grief that is caused by the feelings we are left with when we face an uncertain future.

It's the kind of grief that can keep us awake at night, sleeplessly tossing and turning as we run through possible scenarios in our minds.

And it's the kinds of grief that we are all beginning to carry around with us throughout our day.

This kind of grief has not been felt by many within our collective generations for some time. We are privileged to be able to say that because this kind of grief doesn't just stop with the things we have already lost – it carries through to those things we fear may lose in the future.

And it is this same kind of grief we hear ring out from Mary and Martha as they confront Jesus about Lazarus's death, and the many other losses they imagine they will come to face now that he is gone – *“Jesus if you had been here Lazarus wouldn't have died ...”*

Many of us have come to know this place of deep grief and loss in our lives, but we often do not come to recognize it as also being inhabited by the very Spirit and presence of God as well.

Jesus knew the presence of God's dwelt with Mary and Martha in the midst of their grief, and his actions speak to that truth as he does not rush them through their deep loss.

Instead he stands outside Lazarus' tomb with them, grieving, weeping, and mourning until the women were ready to hear the life-giving promises of God spoke once again.

*(pause)*

Years ago, world renowned Anthropologist Margaret Mead spoke about such accompaniment when she was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of a civilization in a culture.

The student expected their professor to talk about fishhooks, clay pots, or maybe even grinding stones.

But no.

Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was actually a femur (or thighbone) that had been broken and then was healed. In her explanation, Mead shared that in our earliest community gatherings, if you broke your leg, undoubtedly it would have been a death sentence.

With a broken leg you could not run from danger, you could not go to the river to get a drink, you could not expend energy to hunt for food, and you likely wouldn't be able contribute to your tribe in any meaningful way. You were considered nothing more than a weight around your communities' neck – dragging them down towards their own demise.

And so, as a risk your tribe simply couldn't take - you would have been left, unable to heal, isolated, and alone.

This is how things were for eons.

That is until someone decided to break away from the tribe's social norms, to stop, and tend to the needs of the ones who had been left behind.

And so Mead pointed out that a broken leg that had been healed was evidence that someone had in fact chosen to break from their tribe's survivalist mentality. That they had taken the time to stay and accompany the one who had become injured. That they had bound up their wound, carrying and caring for them throughout their time of need to reach a full and lasting recovery, even at their own personal risk.

As it turns out, helping someone else through difficulty is where our society began – it's where we truly came to learn what it means to be a community together, and over the eons it has come to show us that we truly become our best selves when we are serving, walking alongside, or simply sitting with one another in our time of need.

Because like Marth and Mary, we can trust that Jesus waits holding space for us during our deepest points of grief – inviting us to do the same for others in need.

As we sit outside the tomb of our security, our independence, and our connectedness, the Spirit of God comes to dwell with us in the midst of our isolation and worry – helping us to name for ourselves and others, that things will not always be this way.

And we, who feel like we are already sealed up, withering inside the tomb – may we hear the promises of God once again, promises that tell us that whatever has been placed into the hands of God will never be lost again. Arise, be unbound, and live with Christ's hope again with every breath in this world.

A life lived by this gospel is a life shaped by a radically new stance. It is a life that calls us to truly live once again – trusting and knowing that even through deep grief, loss, and death – that we have been promised new life in Christ.

Which frees us to live and be the people of God here in this moment. So may you hear this promise of God ring out in your life this week. May you trust that God has you, that God is with you, and may you be that promise for others you come to encounter this week.

May this be so among us – Amen.