

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2023

Well, we're in the homestretch, we're just a couple of weeks from Easter. Hopefully, this Lent has truly been a fruitful one for each of you. If not, it's not too late, not too late to prepare for whatever it is that God wants to grace you with this Easter. The opportunity is still there for all of us, an opportunity to get ready to be more than we were before, more giving, more loving, more ALIVE and fully human.

Being alive is on full display in today's Gospel passage from John. And not just today, but the last couple of weeks as well. Two weeks ago we saw a woman depart from a well more alive than she had ever been. Last Sunday we saw a blind man encounter Jesus and leave that encounter more alive, more whole than he had been before. And today we just heard how Jesus restored the life of his friend Lazarus - an act that must have astonished those who witnessed it.

And it's powerful not just in the sense of what Jesus was able to do two thousand years ago, no matter how incredible that was. What makes it powerful for me is that I know in faith that the Lord Jesus wants to do that same thing for me. He wants to take every little death I experience, every disappointment, every sorrow, every failure, every cross I have to bear and from them bring about something beautiful, something wonderful, something new, that is, bring from "death" a person more alive than I was before.

And so when Jesus shouts,

"Lazarus, come out!",

he's actually saying that to me too, no matter how unbelievable that sounds. He's inviting me to let him do what he so desperately wants to do, to make me the person he created me to be. The best version of myself. What a God we have!

Yet, that's only part of the story, part of the meaning of this incredible passage. You see, most of us can imagine ourselves as the one in the tomb, the one in desperate need of God's healing power, the one who is bound and buried by many things in this life, and who prays that God will change all of that. And this story gives us great hope especially the RCIA candidates who are going to receive new lives through Christ in the sacrament of baptism a couple of weeks from now.

Or maybe we can also see ourselves as someone on the sideline watching the events unfold. Maybe we hear this story and simply are in awe of what Jesus was able to do, astonished by his power and authority over nature. Yes, this story definitely has a "wow" factor" to it.

But what about Jesus? Is it not possible that we are also being invited and called to put ourselves in his place, being asked to imagine ourselves doing the very thing that Jesus did? On the surface, that might sound a little outrageous. And yet, in faith, we believe that Jesus is precisely the one we are called to imitate.

We see Jesus love, and we are called to love like him. We see him forgive, and we are called to forgive like him. We see him heal, and we are called to heal like him. We see him show compassion and mercy and understanding, and we are called to, well, I guess you get the idea. And we see Jesus at work in this miraculous story and we find ourselves wondering, what exactly are we being called to imitate?

Sometimes I wonder if I am really making this world a better place or if I am making it less than it could be. Sometimes I wonder if I build people up more than I tear them down, give them hope more than I give them reasons to be cynical about life or to be lukewarm in matters of faith. Sometimes I wonder if I forgive more than I judge, or affirm more than I criticize, or give more than I take. In other words, am I a person holding people down and holding them back, someone who (knowingly or not) keeps others bound, keeps others behind a stone I or others have used to

block their path? Or am I their way out from whatever it is that is weighing them down or causing them sorrow or sapping their spirits?

Now, I'm not necessarily talking about the enormous, dramatic ways we can fail to assist others on their journeys of life, fail to be the people others truly need us to be (although that is certainly possible). No, I'm primarily talking about the countless small ways we often fail to reach out to others, fail to give them hope and comfort and affirmation, fail to pick them up from whatever is holding them down. That's to say, do I bring a little light into the darkness of others, bring a little hope into their despair, bring a little "life" into whatever little "death" they are going through?

Or do I just stand at a distance, refusing to roll away the stone, refusing to call out to them in love, refusing to reach out and help untie the straps that bind them?

My dear friends in Christ, we have a choice, a choice each and every day, a choice to be life-givers or not, a choice to be people who share with others the grace we have been gifted with or not, people who extend our hands in love to others or not.

The million dollar question is, who do we want to be?

A Short Story

After the Earthquake had subsided, when the rescuers reached the ruins of a young woman's house, they saw her dead body through the cracks. But her pose was somehow strange that she knelt on her knees like a person was worshipping; her body was leaning forward and her two hands were supporting an object. The collapsed house had crashed her back and her head. With many difficulties, the leader of the rescuer team put his hand through a narrow gap on the wall to reach the woman's body. He was hoping that this woman could still be alive but not really. He and the rest of the team left this house and went to search the next collapsed building. For some reasons, the team leader was driven by a compelling force to go back to the ruin house of the dead woman. Again, he knelt

down and used his hand through the narrow cracks to search the little space under the dead body. Suddenly, he screamed, "A child! There is a child!"

The whole team worked together; carefully they removed the piles of ruined objects around the dead woman. There was a 3 month old little boy wrapped in a flowery blanket under his mother's dead body. Obviously, the woman had made an ultimate sacrifice by using her body to make a cover to protect her son. They opened the blanket and saw a cell phone inside. There was a text message on the screen, it said: "Dear baby, if you can live, always remember that I love you."