

St. Mary's and Trinity Episcopal Churches
April 2, 2017
Year A; 5th Sunday in Lent
Ezekiel 37: 1-14
Psalm 130
John 11: 1-45

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

Today is the 5th Sunday of Lent, and thus next Sunday, the 6th and last Sunday of Lent is Palm Sunday, and the start of Holy Week.

Today's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus, is the entryway, the door into Holy Week, our invitation to open that door and begin to walk to the cross.

This story is the entry point, as it tells of this mindboggling miracle by Jesus, this miracle that the Temple authorities cannot dismiss.

For the past three years Jesus has been traveling and preaching, teaching and healing....Word has spread of his ministry and more and more people have been coming to see him.

Stories of healings of the body, like that of the man born blind that we heard last week.....and healings of the soul, like that of the Samaritan woman, that we heard a few weeks ago, she who told everyone: "Come and see a man who told me everything I had ever done"...and the unspoken...the miracle of forgiveness... Come and see a man who told me everything I had ever done.....and loves me still...

And now Lazarus is not only healed but raised from the dead, and not after a few minutes of death but after days and days....Lazarus had breathed his last, he had died, his body was prepared, the funeral was held, he was sealed in the tomb....and now here is Jesus calling "Come out!", and he is raised, alive again after 4 days!

And this miracle, occurring only 2 miles away from Jerusalem....the friends and mourners rush back to the city, and tell everyone, everyone they know...and the news spreads quickly.....

And word gets to the authorities, those commanding men, who are filled with fear now that this man, this Jesus will take their power....and they begin to plot how to have Jesus killed.

Thus we stand today, at the entry point, the doorway to the cross, at the raising of Lazarus.

I want to note two details in this story, and then return to this image of the threshold to Holy Week.

First, as Christians we understand that Jesus, while in his earthly life, Jesus was both completely human and completely of God, an astounding concept for us to grasp.....and hard to hold on to all at once....

And yet, in this story of Lazarus, in just 45 verses, we get to see Jesus as both deeply God, and as deeply human.

As Jesus receives word that his dear friend Lazarus needs him, word that comes from Lazarus's sisters Mary and Martha, who are also dear to Jesus, when he receives this word, we see in his response, very much Jesus as God.

He does not pack a quick bag and rush off to Lazarus' bedside. The text reminds us "though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" though he loves them, he sees in this illness that God's glory will be revealed, so Jesus waits 2 days to go them.

The Godly Jesus can see far down the road, he knows that he is called to show God's glory in the raising of Lazarus, and he knows that by doing this miracle, he will be hunted down and killed by the authorities. And the Godly Jesus knows he must walk this path, and so he waits.

But after he arrives in Bethany and speaks to first Martha and then Mary, as Jesus sees and feels their grief and love for their brother, as he sees the tears

and grief of their friends, there to offer comfort.....then we see the most human Jesus.

The text tells us his response to their grief: "Jesus began to weep."

In the space of a few lines we see the Godly Jesus knowing all ahead, and the human Jesus, heartbroken in this moment, knowing the pain that these sisters feel at the loss of their brother.

And we are reminded in both of these moments, Godly and human, that Jesus, our Lord and Savior, does walk ahead of us, both knowing the path and feeling the sorrow, so we never walk those lonesome valleys without knowing that Jesus walked them, knew them and felt them too. With the love of our Savior, we are never alone.....

The second detail I want to note occurs as Lazarus emerges from the tomb. Jesus shouts: "Lazarus, come out!" and out Lazarus stumbles, awakened, alive, likely disoriented, and most of all, bound up, wrapped and wrapped all around in the long linen strips that were used to prepare a body for burial.

And so, as Jesus has called Lazarus forth, so too he calls the onlookers, to do their part, saying to them: "Unbind him and let him go."

Unbind him, help him, release him from all that is death, so he can reach and stretch and live!

We can see the grave cloths in our own days....all that we and others need help to be unbound from, what we get wrapped and tangled and held short by... wrapped up in our fears, our worries, our doubts, our failings.....All that holds us back from living resurrected lives.....

And we can see the grave cloths in our broken and hurting world.....the graveclothes of living in poverty, of living in the midst of war, the grave clothes of famine and disease that wrap and tangle and hold back so many.....How are we called, how is Jesus saying to us, in our daily life and in our larger world..... "Unbind them and let them go."

And finally, yes, we are on the threshold of Holy Week...We stand here at the door, we are invited next week to walk with Jesus as he enters Jerusalem, to wave our palm branches and cry out hosanna to the King.

We are invited, to sit in the upper room at the Last Supper as darkness falls and to hear.... "this is my body this is my blood.....do this in remembrance of me....."

We are invited to go to the Garden of Gethsemane.....and onward to the foot of the cross, and to go to the tomb with the women....as they quickly wrapping Jesus's lifeless body as the sunsets on Good Friday, and we are invited to wait with the women, to join their sorrow as they wait for dawn.

The door to Holy Week stands open.....and we are invited.

Amen.

The Rev. Megan Limburg