

Practicing Resurrection

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1st Class

I. Looking at Lent as a Journey from Death to Life

The Season of Lent is often viewed as a journey in which we are saved from our sins. Last Sunday, we began Lent by revisiting Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and we were invited in the Collect for that day (the summary prayer at the beginning of the Liturgy) to recognize the "weaknesses of each of us." As we make our way in Lent, our collect trace out a particular path of transformation: penance (BCP Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent), renewal (BCP Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent), refreshment (BCP Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Lent), and grace (BCP Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent).

By doing so, our liturgies follow a well-worn path and assign to us traditional readings that have been followed for many years. The goal of these readings is to point us in the direction of the Atonement -- on what it takes for us to be made right with God, which Christians believe happened at the crucifixion, when Jesus died for our sins on the cross. On the cross, Jesus offered a sacrifice, or prayer, that we could not offer on our behalf so that we would find forgiveness for all the ways that we have been less than who God created us to be. On the cross, Jesus defeated the power of death, died for our sins, and showed us God's infinite love for us.

However, there is another way to go through Lent, I believe, which has been obscured by this familiar path. This way proceeds by looking at Jesus's journey to Jerusalem not as a walk from life to death, but as journey from death to life.

In this journey, the resurrection is not a reward or surprise-ending waiting to appear after Jesus has died, and all seems lost, but as a reality that begins to emerge as Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem. Therefore, Jesus is not so much walking to his death, but walking to his life. And this is good news for us, because in the process, Jesus is revealing to us what it means to live as if death were not. To say a bit more about some key Christian practices:

- **Loving:** This means that every moment that we love, our love goes with the grain of the universe. Our love is a participation in God's love. Every act of love is an expression of the love that is stronger than death.
- **Forgiving:** This means that we forgive not simply because Jesus has forgiven us, but because our forgiveness participates in God's infinite power to reconcile all things. Our forgiveness is the work of Christ's forgiveness in us, Christ's resurrection power in us.

- **Giving:** This means that when we give ourselves to others, we participate in what Christ is always already giving us. That is to say, Jesus's death on the cross does not exhaust all of what Christ has given to God, or sacrificed, on our behalf. Rather, Jesus is continuing to pour his sacrificial love on us and our world each day. As a result, when we give ourselves away, we are not losing ourselves but gaining ourselves.
- **Living:** This means that our life is found in the relationships we build rather than in the achievements we attain. It means that a central part of what it means to be a Christian is to learn how to die in order to learn how to live. It also means that in God's economy of grace, nothing is wasted. There is no excess or defect in what God has made. There is no moment or event that will not be reconciled and transformed by grace. Therefore, everything that happens to us not only happens for a reason, but we begin to practice the power of resurrection in our lives when we use the different ways that we have experienced death as a means to life.

II. John 11: 1-44

Tonight, we will begin to scratch the surface of what this all means by looking tonight at a passage from the Gospel of John:

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' 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.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' 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. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at

home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

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.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 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. 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.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 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 for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. 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.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' 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.'

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

II. Exercise/Discussion

Let's begin to explore this passage by taking a few moments to look at it from the standpoint of one of the main characters:

Jesus

Thomas and the Disciples

Martha

Mary

Lazarus

Try to imaginatively place yourself in, say, the role of Mary. What does it mean to see your savior weep?

What about Martha? What does it mean to hear a promise of healing that seems far off?

What about Thomas? What does it mean to follow Jesus even when he delays and you are certain that it will lead to death?

What about Lazarus? What does resurrection look like to you?

What does this passage from the perspective of one of these characters reveal to you?

III. Some Art

Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890, "Raising of Lazarus" 1890



Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) "Raising of Lazarus"(1630-1632)



Sid Hammer (1926-1969), "Lazarus" 1964



Chris Ofili (1968-), "The Raising of Lazarus" 2007



“The Healing of the Blind Man and the Raising of Lazarus” (1129–34)

