

## Here We Are, Church

### *John 11: 1-45*

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus,<sup>[a]</sup> “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4 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.” 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus<sup>[b]</sup> was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” 8 The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” 9 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. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” 11 After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” 12 The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin,<sup>[c]</sup> said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus<sup>[d]</sup> had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles<sup>[e]</sup> away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.<sup>[f]</sup> Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27 She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,<sup>[g]</sup> the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

28 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.” 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 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. 32 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.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 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.

The other day I saw a sign on a church which read, "I wasn't on planning giving up this much for Lent." It's true, we have all been forced into this reality. We have all given up far more than we anticipated. When we listen to what words people are using to describe this transition, they are words like overwhelmed, anxious, exhausted, stressed, surreal. And inside of these very real descriptions is the language of grief.

We. Are. Grieving. The world has changed overnight. We don't know how long this is going to last or when it is going to end. Some of us have felt the loss of income, jobs, savings. The loss of graduations and birthday parties. The loss of human connection and being in shared spaces with those we love and enjoy. We have all lost life as we knew it.

Our grief is only heightened when we hear about health care workers who are caring for the sick without proper protection. Doctors who are forced to make impossible decisions of who will live and who will die. People who are mourning their loved ones without the dignity of a funeral.

Here we are, church. We. Are. Grieving.

It is what makes today's story so powerful for me. Lazarus has fallen ill and now is dead. Collective grief hangs in the air. Mary and Martha lament, "If only you were here Jesus, we wouldn't be going through this right now." How many times have we said this ourselves lately? It is an overwhelming scene. It is an exhausting scene. And most profoundly: rather than Jesus avoiding the grief, he leans into it, and he weeps.

*God weeps.*

God's tears splash onto sacred soil. Grief's tumultuous waves spill onto Jesus' shores. He leans into the incarnational holy reality of death; of loving what death has touched; of being human with us.

In the Greek they are tears of rage. Rage against the forces that rob us of life: injustice, oppression, sickness, disease. Jesus leans into his grief. And it breaks him down, just like it breaks us down.

But the story doesn't end there. Jesus speaks a word of life into death's lair. "Lazarus, come out!" We might imagine Lazarus' lungs filling up with *ruah* breath. His heart begins to pound as blood pumps through his veins. His ligaments and sinews begin firing. He wiggles his fingers and toes. Jesus' word brings life. Lazarus rises. Hope rises. Justice rises. Love rises.

In the Netflix series about Queen Elizabeth's life called, *The Crown* there is a powerful episode about a small mining town in the United Kingdom called Aberfan. After several days of rain, the mountain of coal they excavated avalanches down onto the town crushing a school with 81 children inside. The queen's husband, Prince Philip, goes to the funeral and when he comes back the queen asks him how it was. "Extraordinary," he said. "The grief, the anger against the government, at the [system], at God too. Eighty-one children were buried today. [I saw] the rage in all the faces, behind their eyes. [But] they didn't smash things up or fight in the streets." "So what did they do?" the queen asks. "They sang. The whole community sang." A word of life sung into the darkest of midnights. Love rising through their voices, love alive in their tears. Jesus speaks a word into death's darkness, because life always finds a way. Love *always* finds a way.

The other day a health care worker told me about how her colleagues brought in their own sewing machines and started making their own masks. Some from our church, like Carol, made some masks for an organization that donated 800 masks during this time of shortage.

On social media there is a photo of the young boy playing tic-tac-toe with his grandpa through a window using painter's tape and washable markers.

Distilleries and beauty brands have pivoted to making hand sanitizer in response to shortages.

Florists are "flowerbombing" random areas in cities, with the flowers they can't sell; covering monuments and benches with lavish colorful blossoms.

Jesus will not let death stop him and neither will we, because as Christians, we are people who know our journey is not to the grave, but through it.

So here we are, church, going through this grave moment together. Doing our best to speak words of life, trusting that death is not the end. At least, not when Love has something to say about it. And love *always* has something to say about it. And to for reality the church says, Amen.