

“Unfinished Stories: Lazarus”

John 11:32-44

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In 1987 a movie came out that has become a classic of sorts. 2 of the main actors were Mandy Patinkin and the ever funny Billy Crystal. Couldn't help but think of Lazarus with this clip.

(<https://vimeo.com/28442042>, specifically from 2:02 to 3:13)

Miracle Max, that is Billy Crystal, says “There's a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Mostly dead is slightly alive.” Friends I want you, Jesus wants you to be fully alive not mostly dead or slightly alive.

And to paraphrase the movie clip: “Hello...Hello out there. What's so important? What you got worth living for?” It's not the MLT---Mutton Lettuce Tomato...but it is true love. True love is the greatest thing. Jesus came to love you, die for you, and rise again for you....that is true love.

So in this last of the series of Unfinished Stories we talk of Lazarus. Earlier in the chapter from the passage that was read we find Jesus talking to Lazarus sister Martha:

John 11:25-26 English Standard Version (ESV)²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

In the midst of death there is the reminder who this powerful Jesus is. He is the life giver. Now Mary, her sister Martha, and brother Lazarus were friends of Jesus. It was not like he did not have a relationship with her... he knew them and cared deeply about their family.

When Jesus arrives she both sisters Mary and Martha were going to the tomb to weep and grieve their loss. We even have the natural emotion by Mary in a sense blaming Jesus... “Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died.” Very raw emotion. As much faith as we may have there are times we our human emotions get in the way and anger, which is part of grief takes over. And our anger is sometimes directed at God. And you know, God is big enough to handle your anger.

In fact scripture says that those who had come to the tomb with her were also weeping. And then we find these special words.... “He, Jesus, was deeply moved in his spirit.” He felt for his friends for whom he cared for deeply. The shortest verse of the Bible is John 11:35. Simply 2 words and yet a powerful verse. It simply and proudly says, “Jesus wept.” About the only other time we find specifically recorded that Jesus cried was later on when he weeps over Jerusalem as he enters the wholly city (Luke 19:41)

In fact one translation puts it this way, “Jesus sobbed.” (NIRV) It was heartfelt, not just a one tissue event...but a heartfelt release of liquid love coming from His eyes. Jesus grieves when we grieve. He cries when we cry. He identifies with us.

Sometimes we need someone to cry with in times of grief, loss or illness. Jesus was always moved with compassion---was always deeply moved. I am thankful we have a group at PHUMC that have been trained are ready to be with you in times of illness and grief. Take a look. **(PHUMC video of Congregational Care clip) /////REV. CATHY---Stephen Ministry moment (Stephen Ministry logo)/////**

Just as Jesus was moved with compassion so Stephen Ministers are moved and called to be with you in these times of need. God is always by your side, but oh it is so helpful, whatever the issue to have someone who listens, prays and is also along with you. Is God calling you to be a Stephen Minister? May some like Jesus be deeply moved to cry along with those who cry.

But those with Mary and Martha or questioning Jesus. Why if he opened the eyes of the blind, why didn't he keep this man from dying? (verse 37)

Jesus had the power....He is the resurrection and the life...then why? You know I believe it is common to be fearful of death. However let's throw a different perspective on it. Rev. Billy Graham said, “Many people say they do not fear death, but the process of dying. It's not the destination, but the trip that they dread.”

One Sunday morning a preacher asked the congregation, "How many want to go to heaven?" Hands went up everywhere. However one little boy on the front row didn't raise his hand. The preacher, thinking maybe the boy hadn't heard the question, asked again, "How many want to go to heaven?" Again, hands went up everywhere, but the boy didn't raise his hand. So, the preacher asked the boy, "Johnny, don't you want to go to heaven?" Johnny responded, "Sure I do." The preacher then asked, "Well, why didn't you raise a hand?" to which Johnny replied, "Well, I thought you were trying to put together a load to go right now."

Kenny Chesney had a song in 2008 called “Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven.” Part of the lyrics, “Everybody wants to go to heaven, Have a mansion high above the clouds, Everybody wants to go to heaven, But nobody wants to go now.”

Ah so true. Don't want to go now...I've got some living to do. I don't want to fear...I know where I'm going...I've got a Reservation for the final destination...but it's the final trip I'm not looking forward to.

So Jesus is at the tomb and they let Jesus know that Lazarus has been dead 4 days. Now it is interesting that specifically 4 days is mentioned. According to Judaism and midrashic tradition a person's spirit would hover and hang around the body for 3 days. Therefore if it were 4 days...the spirit would have already gone. So...Jesus why raise him now...you were too late.

Greg was without oxygen for 17 minutes....Lazarus has been with oxygen for 4 days!!! Martha says to Jesus, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor." One translation literally puts it, "He stinketh!"

A pastoral experience that I hope I will never have happen again was in a previous church when I was called to some members mobile home. Police tape was set up, a TV crew was trying to get video footage. Unfortunately the husband had fallen and died in the house, the beloved wife had depression and went into shock and left her husband dead on the floor for a couple of days because "she just didn't want to leave him." As I identified myself, crossed the police line I saw the wife with her adult daughter outside and went to be with them. I passed the door where specially suited and protected investigators were going into the home. Friends I never ever want to smell that odor again.

Yes, Martha was concerned when Lazarus was to be taken from the tomb. Never underestimate the power of Jesus. At the tomb Jesus calls, "Lazarus, come out." And Lazarus came out...his hands and feet bound with lines strips and his face wrapped with a burial cloth. Can you imagine? Can you imagine being a part of the group that had gathered at the tomb? Martha and Mary's reaction? And to be honest.... Lazarus reaction. I mean come on it was a *grave* situation. Talk about a miracle man!!!!

And so the story of Lazarus. Oh, but wait the story is not finished. We typically think that that is the end of the Lazarus story. But when we go on to chapter 12, the next chapter we find that Jesus is in Bethany where Lazarus was. IN fact Martha served and Lazarus was there at the table and also Mary. But then we get to this as part of the Unfinished Story.

John 12:9-11 English Standard Version (ESV) ⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

So here is a bit more of the Unfinished rest of the story. People were coming to Jesus in part to see this living breathing miracle named Lazarus. They made plans to put Lazarus to death. Why? Many were seeing Lazarus and believing in Jesus.

So the potential Unfinished Story. We do not find Lazarus mentioned again. Did they kill him--- put him to death? How many believed Lazarus simply because of his story. As Lazarus continued to live and testify about the power of Jesus people met Jesus through him.

Have people met Jesus because of your story? Have you told your story? Now part of the unfinished story is that yes, Lazarus one day died. His physical life was over. Weird thought, I wonder if buried.. he thought, "I've been here before. This is déjà vue all over again."

Jesus wants you right now to have that assurance of eternal life. I saw this couple of weeks ago and it gave me a chuckle. I saw a posting that said, “I just ordered a life alert bracelet so if I ever get a life I’ll be notified immediately” Oh friends in the previous chapter, John 10:10 Jesus says, “I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly.” Not mostly dead or slightly alive, but abundantly alive. That is why Jesus came....woo-hoo!

Except for Lazarus the following has a strong message. **If you are born once you will die twice. If you are born twice you will die once.**

That formula doesn’t apply to Lazarus who literally died twice physically. So what do we mean...born once die twice. We are born once physically, and we will die a physical death. Hate to be the one to break it to you, but we are all terminal. As my dear dad use to say, “You are not going to get out of this world alive.” However if you are just born once you will die a physical death and if you do not receive Jesus into your life and ask Him to forgive you of your sins there will be a second death, a spiritual eternal death.

Revelation 21:8 New Living Translation (NLT) ⁸“But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Beloved we talked of going to heaven, as I believe there is a heaven I also believe there is a hell.

The other part of that phrase is “If you are born twice you will die once.” This is the aspect as Jesus talked about earlier in John 3 to Nicodemus and told him, “You must be born again.” Be born anew. Physically born and a second birth that is a spiritual birth where you are given eternal life through your acceptance of Jesus. So then you are born twice and will only die once---a physical death....because you will have eternal life and will spiritually live forever.

If you are born once you will die twice. If you are born twice you will die once. Are you with me?

We can have the assurance that Jesus has forgiven us if we have asked Him to. God is with us in this journey there is no need to fear.

Let me address again that fear of dying by telling a story that has become quite familiar. There was an old country doctor who would take his dog along with him when visiting patients. The dog would remain outside while the doctor went in for the house call.

On one occasion, the physician went to the home of a man with a terminal disease who didn’t seem to have much time to live. The man confessed to the doctor his fears about death and said, “What’s it like when you die?”

The doctor thought for a moment, then got up and opened the front door. His loyal canine friend, who had been waiting patiently on the porch, gleefully bounded in to join his master. The doctor turned to the dying man and said, "Do you see this dog? He didn't have any idea what was on this side of that door. All he knew was that his master was there, and he wanted to be with him."

"That's how I feel about death," the physician continued. "I don't really know all the whats and hows about dying. I'm not totally sure what's on the other side of that door. But I know who is there, and that's enough for me. I'm looking forward to being with my Master."

Do not fear. God is with you.

Psalm 27:1 English Standard Version (ESV) 27 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Let's break that down. The Lord is my light and my salvation....now for you to answer....Whom shall I fear? Xxxxx

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? XXXXXXXX

(Prayer)