

**Fifth Sunday of Lent**  
**Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas**  
**22 March 2026**

**John 11:1-45**

There are many who believe the last chapter of their life has already been written. They are living their last years and they feel as though they have run out of time. Or perhaps they are in a particular situation from which they don't expect to be able to get out. The time for planting has passed. All there is left is to engage in a series of mundane and repetitive activities that extend life beyond its usefulness but don't bring much joy or creativity. You get up in the morning and brush your teeth, sometimes you take a shower, you walk to the mailbox to check the mail, although you know it is empty because the mailman does not come until just before Jeopardy. After breakfast, you log on to your computer and check Facebook for hours. Then comes lunch and nap, followed by an afternoon of news on Fox news or CNN. You hit up leftovers for dinner, after which you fall asleep on the couch watching an old episode of Law and Order. You wake up with a creek on your neck at 11:30pm and transfer to your bed, where you struggle to fall asleep until sheer exhaustion and a Xanax finally do the trick. Then you get up at 7:00 in the morning ready to do it all over again, until God takes you home someday.

I had a friend for whom this was the routine, the only difference being that instead of watching the news for hours, he would walk to a local park and sit on a bench for hours staring into the distance. This took place for several years until one day he met a young mother of a six- or seven-year-old boy at this park. She was sobbing on a bench while the child chased a small dog. My friend asked if she was okay. She looked at him with great sadness and said, "Charlie, my kid over there," she pointed to the child, "was just suspended for three days for fighting. He is failing math and I don't have the money or the time for tutoring. A kid made fun of him today for asking a simple question he should have known already. He felt humiliated and punched the kid on the face. He then run out of school. I had to take the day off from work, which I can't afford to do." After some conversation, my friend learned that there was no father, grandfather, or support system in the child's life. The young family seemed to be alone in the world.

To make a long story short, over the next year my friend befriended the young family, became a surrogate grandfather for Charlie, visited with him at the park every day after school, began tutoring the kid a little bit at a time until Charlie began to do better in school, and eventually asked the mother and child to move in with him. His wife had died a few years back and his two grown children lived far

away. Suddenly, he had a responsibility to this young woman and Charlie, whom he helped raise until he graduated High School and moved to LSU. When Charlie was a sophomore in college, my friend died, leaving his house to Charlie and his mother, who by then had become his second family.

My friend learned during those years that only God could write the last chapter of his life. There was one more great adventure God had prepared for him. There was a young woman who needed a father and a young boy who needed a grandfather. And he had nothing but time and resources to do the job. There was a mission to accomplish and he was the best suited person for such a mission. At the time he met this young family, he knew he only had two or three years left in him. But God gave him eleven wonderful years filled with baseball games, debate competitions, paper-editing, young friends running in the backyard and swimming in the pool, the occasional argument, some phenomenal meals because Charlie's mother was a great cook, and finally, great comfort as he got ill and the young woman quit her job to take care of him full-time. He, who was as good as dead, found new life and a great adventure when he least expected it.

Today we have two stories of hopelessness. The Israelites in Babylon feel completely dejected. They believe God has turned against them and has forgotten them. Decades have passed in exile and they believe they would die in captivity. The last chapter of their history has been written. They will never return to the Promised Land. They are paying the consequences for their ancestors' sin and they will die in captivity. But today, God tells them through the prophet Ezekiel. "You believe the last chapter of your life has been written and you are as dead as decaying bones. But I am the God of life and only I can write the last chapter of your life. Only I determine when your story will end. I have the ability to bring old bones back to life and breathe new spirits into decaying corpses. Don't say, 'My life is done, and God doesn't care.' There are many journeys still waiting for you. It is not over until I say, it is over!"

Then, there is the story of Lazarus of Bethany. He is so dead that his body is already smelling. He is dead and his sisters are feeling hopeless. As the male in the family, he is the only one with the right of inheritance. Without him, they will most likely have to rely on a scribe to manage or mismanage their finances. There are many stories of these scribes squandering the money of widows and wealthy women who don't have a husband or a male relative. The passage does not give us an indication that the sisters are married or that there are male cousins or relatives in the family. This death could mean financial ruin for them. Of course, the loss of someone they love is heartbreaking in itself. They are overcome with grief and feel all alone in the universe. They exclaim, "Lord, if you had been here!"

The sisters believe that Jesus is Lord of life, but this is a theological belief, meaning, they believe in the resurrection at the last day. Someday in the future, Jesus will be Lord of life, in another time and place. In a kingdom beyond the stars. But Jesus makes it very clear. Only he can write the next chapter of their lives. Only he can tell when their story will be over. He is Lord of life even now, here on this earth, here on this village just outside of Jerusalem. And while others grumble and say, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus is busy writing the next chapter of the young family's story, and in many ways, writing the last chapter of his own earthly story. The next chapter of the young family's story is resurrection and a new life. Not just a new life, but also a new faith. This resurrection makes all the difference for them. They now see Jesus in a new light. This man truly is the Son of God, the Messiah of the world. They will carry this faith throughout the rest of their lives and this new faith will make all the difference.

But he is also busy writing what will become the last chapter of his early life. Experts believe that it was this episode that got the Judeans to hold a secret consultation to find ways to arrest and kill Jesus. Some of the witnesses of the Lazarus resurrection run on to tell the Pharisees what they had seen. It is at this point that the authorities make up their mind. This Jesus of Nazareth is bad for Temple business. At minimum, they see him as an enemy of Judaism, an impostor with a powerful brand of magic they don't understand. And we all know what happened afterwards. Soon after this episode, he is arrested and killed.

Many of us feel as though we are well into the last chapter of our lives. In fact, some of us believe we know how our story will end. But only God can write that last chapter. There are journeys God has prepared for us to take, new adventures, pilgrimages of faith and self-discovery. There is still much work to be done in God's vineyard. We can draw down the curtains and settle for a status quo that keeps us bound to our old ways, or we can venture outside the physical and metaphorical doors of our homes. There is life awaiting to be lived. There is love to be shared with the world. There is a mission field waiting just outside of those doors. It is never too late to let God infuse new life into our old, rattling bones.

May our Lord continue to bless you. Amen!