

Tapping into Resurrection Power is about having faith and believing what Jesus has promised, even when it defies logic. It's about trust and resting in the assurance that God has the situation covered. Today's text from John 11 is unique in many respects. Theologians have described it as a pivotal miracle which starts the chain of events that leads to the Crucifixion of Jesus. They consider it as a "resurrection that will lead to death", in that the raising of Lazarus will lead to the death of Jesus, the Son of God, in Jerusalem which will reveal the Glory of God. John Calvin, the famous reformer theologian writes that "not only did Christ give a remarkable proof of his Divine power in raising Lazarus, but he likewise placed before our eyes a lively image of our future resurrection."

The miracle of the raising of Lazarus is the climax of John's "signs". It explains the crowds seeking Jesus on Palm Sunday, and leads directly to the decision of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin to plan to kill Jesus.

While this passage from John is familiar because it focuses on Jesus' most dramatic miracle, the raising of a decomposing body, it also is significant because it shows what a genuine friend Jesus was. While he knew that Lazarus would return to life, he still wept with his friend. That's the sign of a true friend, one that is there during good times, but also is willing to cry with us when we are sad.

Most of us here today have experienced the very loss that Lazarus' friends and family went through. Just yesterday, I attended the memorial of my dear friend, Bob Miles, a Southern Baptist Pastor and theologian. I know that I will see Bob again one day but I am very sad for his family and friends. I am also sad because I know Bob suffered tremendously as he fought the cancer that was literally eating away at his bones.

After a trip to Israel this spring, Bob was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. Bob's lung cancer moved rapidly and he would die just a couple months after the diagnosis was made.

I shared yesterday my question for why Bob had to suffer so greatly. His wife called me back in early May describing his agony and his crying out. I couldn't do

much but to pray with and for her. And I know that God will redeem the pain Bob suffered one day. I know that because I know that God loved Bob and that he had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Bob Miles was a model Christian. He was a lifelong disciple. He had served the Lord as a pastor and teacher at Gateway Bible Seminary. He truly had made a significant difference in many people's lives. He had been a good and faithful servant of the Lord. I am terribly sad for all of the people, myself included, that mourn his passing but I rejoice that Bob is at home with his Lord, healed and whole once more. Bob played an important role in my life over the past 8 years since I got to know him and his wife, Connie. Bob was one of the participants in my ordination service this past November here at Calvary. Bob and his wife, Connie, have become dear friends and have been present for many holidays and important events in my life and in Annalise's life. They attended her baptism, have been present at Christmas parties and have become like family. It occurred to me that those important milestones will still happen but Bob won't be present in a physical form. The legacy of his love will remain as a memory and one day there will be a glorious reunion.

And while we don't know very much about Lazarus, we know he was well loved by many people. Like Bob's presence at my family's celebrations, Jesus had come to know Lazarus and his family and spent considerable time with them in Bethany. And we know that Lazarus' family had done what they thought was essential when Lazarus had become deathly ill—they had sent word for Jesus to come. But time lapsed and not only had Lazarus died, but a significant time had passed.

Without being too graphic, after a body dies, the process of decomposition begins almost immediately. Cells lyse, bacteria multiply and inevitably tissue starts to break down. Four days had passed since Lazarus breathed his last. I can imagine the grief his sisters experienced. The pain and disappointment was probably overwhelming for Mary. Remember, she was the one who washed Jesus' feet with her hair and perfume-perfume that had cost a year's wages. From Mark 14 we remember the story that on a previous occasion while Jesus had been in Bethany that "Mary had come to the home of Simon the Leper with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages."

So why didn't Jesus come immediately to heal Lazarus before he died? Why did he wait?

These are the questions that must have been asked by the disciples and Lazarus' friends. After showing her devotion to Jesus, why didn't he travel the two miles and restore Lazarus immediately?

And Jesus explains why he waited in verse 40 when he asks the question that is the focus of today's sermon, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

There are probably a number of you that unfortunately are navigating grief. I embarked on the journey of moving through grief significantly with the passing of my mother 8 ½ years ago. Prior to her death, she was frequently in and out of the hospital. I remember a seminary friend praying for me and telling me that sometimes our loved ones are healed in this lifetime and that sometimes we may have to wait until the next lifetime for their complete healing and restoration. I have hung on to this wise advice and I wrestle with the pain of loss and grieving. I discovered that some days are easier than others. Some days, I am stronger than others.

Very few people in this congregation have not experienced grief. Grief comes in waves and often times hits when we are feeling bereft and missing someone close to us.

So when Jesus had finally arrived in Bethany, not only had Lazarus died but his funeral had taken place and he was in the tomb.

When Jesus asked that the tomb be opened, Lazarus' sister Martha countered Him: "Jesus, you could have seen his body if you have come when he first died, but now he has been dead for four days. He has been decomposing for four days. There is nothing left to be done. There is nothing You can do. His body will smell at this point. You don't want that memory. You don't want us all to be struck by the odor of his decomposing body."

She still didn't understand – she still didn't believe. She believed that Jesus could have done something while Lazarus was alive, but now he was dead – four days dead – very dead – what could Jesus possibly do now?

Where is the cut-off line for God? When is a request too much for God to handle? When are our prayers too difficult for God to answer?

Martha had her eschatological facts right, she knew that he will rise again in the resurrection. However, her problem was not that, her problem was the NOW, the present, her felt need. She kind of felt like Lazarus should be alive, that he shouldn't have died.

The Bible says that Lazarus was sick but we aren't told what was ailing him. Maybe it was cancer, but we really don't know what the life-threatening condition was. Before he died, however, I believe his sisters made a lot of attempts to save him. Maybe they summoned doctors and healers, maybe they gave him medicine, and/or prayed very hard, but all their efforts were in vain. With all the attempts they made, they saw their beloved Lazarus succumb to death and breathe his last. A funeral was conducted and they buried their beloved Lazarus, and walked away from the tomb in grief, disappointment, pain, and despair.

And now, just like they walked away from the grave, Jesus wants them to walk with Him back to the grave where they lost hope and buried him.

I am sure Lazarus' family was very disappointed with Jesus for delaying or not coming on time. They loved Jesus very much - certainly they had deserved Him dropping whatever he was doing and rushing the two miles back to Bethany.

After all, hadn't we seen the devotion of this family? Mary had spent time worshiping at his feet, anointing Him with very expensive oil, and Martha served Him wholeheartedly, and yet He didn't come on time when they needed Him the most. They buried him but their feelings or emotions were not buried. And they had this stone on the tomb - the stone of closure, but closure with a lot of pain.

Maybe this is something you can relate to. Maybe God has seemingly delayed answering your prayers. Maybe you have been hurt by someone that professed

to be a Christian or felt like God has let you down. And maybe you have put a stone to block anymore more painful memory. You have said, "I will not place myself in a position to be hurt ever again." Maybe you have even decided to close that chapter, phase the pain out. Perhaps you have placed a heavy stone to block any memory to surface.

Before you give up entirely, I would challenge you to hang on. Jesus knows and he cares! Jesus is there, ready and willing to heal, to restore and to bring new life where there is only pain and death.

And that is what the bottom line of this passage is about: Knowing that God is in control. Just like Jesus said in verse 41, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

Tapping into Resurrection Power is about having faith and believing what Jesus has promised. It's about believing in God's goodness and trusting that he WILL do what he says he will do. When we think we know the way things are going to work out and the way the story will end, this miracle John describes of raising Lazarus from the dead reassures us that we need to trust. We will be rewarded for our faith. Whenever that moment arrives, the Lord will meet the need of the believer. What the believer must do is what Martha and Mary had to do: learn to wait upon God. The Lord WILL act at the right moment.

We can't dictate to God when to act or how to act.

So we are encouraged to sit confidently, resting in the assurance that God has the situation covered. And that's what tapping into resurrection power is all about: it's about knowing whom to trust, whom to believe, and whom to place our complete faith in: the risen Savior!