

Beautiful Things Out of Dust

A Homily Preached by Janelle Brinker

First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee

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Sing....

I want to start with a disclaimer. I am going to share about our adventure from the last year that many of you know about. But for those of you who don't know, I will start by saying that Jared is here and healthy and well now.

Last year the season of Lent took on a depth of meaning I could never have imagined. My husband and sweet partner in life experienced death in his body, right next to me. But for no reason at all, his heart stopped, and he had to be resuscitated. Even though his heart was brought back to life, he wasn't there so he had to be medically induced into a coma in order to let his body rest and heal, and 3 days he laid in the tomb, and I waited in lament and wondering. Lent for me this year, and perhaps every year for the rest of my life is closely tied to this experience of death and waiting.

We stayed in the hospital for almost 2 weeks. And when we were finally able to return to church the scripture for that Lenten Sunday was the story of Mary and Martha's interaction with Jesus upon the death of their brother Lazarus. Do you know that story?

Jesus is out of town and Mary and Martha send for him because their brother Lazarus is sick and dying, and needs healing. And Jesus decides to stay put for a few more days. And by the time Jesus gets around to coming to Mary and Martha, Lazarus is already dead...

The story is called "Lazarus is raised from the dead" but for me the story is really about Mary and Martha and their frustration with and faith in Jesus.

John 11:32-37

So I was in the 9th and 10th grade SS class and we read this scripture, the curriculum asked us this questions "can you imagine being by your brothers side as he dies, burying him, and THEN Jesus shows up? What do you think that would be like?" ...can you imagine?

Yes. I can imagine.

Dead in an instant.

Coma for 3 days

Then when he woke up

I felt this strange mix of relief and grief

Yes, I can imagine.
I can imagine watching death.
The sounds. The feelings of time slowing. The shock.
I can imagine the coming back to life after it all.
The smell. The joy.

Along with the whispers in the crowd I still wonder
“Could not the man who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man alive?”
But in the midst of these questions Jesus approaches the grave.

John 11:38-39

There is already a stench! It is the worst it could be. He is not just dead, he is rotting.
RETURNING TO DUST. it is too late. **And all of creation experiences this death in all kinds of ways: Losing loved ones. Divorce. Losing a job. A friendship.** And I am Martha at the tomb, informing Jesus that IT IS TOO LATE.

Can't you see hearts are broken? People we love have cancer. Kids are shooting kids at their schools. People we love are depressed. Homelessness and poverty seem never to go away. Countries are war torn and their people have nowhere to go. It's too late. **Jesus, can't you smell the stench?!**

And Martha is not wrong. The death is too far along. The stench is unbearable. But Jesus says to Martha and to us, **Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?** You will see the glory of God, that is a promise.

As Jesus anticipates his own journey toward the horrifyingly dead place that is the cross, he says this to the disciples:

John 12:24-26

Jesus approaches the stench of the grave and invites us to follow him. Because somehow in the midst of darkness and loss, alongside our Jesus we get to see and participate in the new reality breaking forth. Resurrection life!

Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.