

Title: All Things Christ

Text: John 11:1-16; 38-43

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A few years ago, I was driving on the highway to work when something happened that I want to share with you. My morning commute was roughly 45 minutes each way, and I drove the same route at the same time almost every day, Monday through Thursday. This was my routine. Every day, I drove the same road to work, with the same stoplight, the same gas station on the right, and the same coffee shop on the left. Same rhythm and same familiar, almost hypnotic, scenes. Life had become so predictable that I could almost drive it with my eyes closed.

But one morning, something unusual happened.

As I turned the corner near my work, I saw a small crowd gathered around something in the road. Cars were slowing down. People were stepping out onto the sidewalk. Curious, I pulled over to see what was happening.

There, in the middle of the street, was a tiny kitten trapped down inside a storm drain. I could hear it crying, but I couldn't see it very well.

Once the shock of seeing the trapped kitten wore off, what struck me most was this: everyone had somewhere to go that morning. People were on their way to work. Kids were on their way to school. Meetings were beginning. Schedules and projects were waiting. But for a moment, everyone stopped.

This one kitten's problem captured a whole community of people and moved them into action. One man knelt. Another brought a flashlight. Someone found a long stick. A woman lay flat on the pavement and reached her arm through the grate until finally, the kitten was lifted out. And when it happened, the whole crowd cheered.

Then everyone got back in their cars and continued their day. Same road. Same stoplight. Same coffee shop. But something had changed for me. Because for just a moment, on the way somewhere else... a community of people paused and remembered what mattered.

Lent does something like that. The church calls this season Lent, and for forty days, we slow down our usual routines. We interrupt our schedules long enough to remember what matters most. And this year, our theme has been "On the Way With Jesus."

That language is important because the Christian life isn't a destination where we arrive and then maintain. The Christian life is a journey symbolized by a road and by our walking it. Sometimes the road is clear. Sometimes it winds through wilderness. Sometimes we stop along the way to see something we might otherwise have missed. But we are always on the way with Jesus.

Which brings us to an important milestone for us at First Presbyterian Church. Today, we stand at another crossroads. Today, we elect a Pastor Nominating Committee. And on the surface, that might sound like church business on the same par with committees, procedures, and paperwork. But it's actually something far deeper.

When a church chooses a Pastor Nominating Committee, that congregation is really asking a spiritual question: *Where is Jesus leading us next on the road?* And that question connects directly to our bold sermon title for today: “All Things Christ.”

I hope we hear that bold phrase in all that is meant by its claim. Some might be thinking, “*Now wait a minute, Eddie. That sounds wonderful, but is it really possible?*” After all, life is complicated. We have jobs and families to raise. Some of us are experiencing health concerns that keep us awake at night or bills waiting in the mailbox. How can we possibly live in all things Christ? The answer begins with something necessary about faith. We must practice the pause.

In today’s reading, Jesus receives word that his friend Lazarus is very sick. Now, if we were writing the story, we would expect Jesus to rush to Bethany. After all, his close friend was sick, but he didn’t rush to help. He pauses, and the bible is specific that he paused for two days. Jesus pausing feels strange to us. But in other gospel stories about him, Jesus sometimes pauses because something deeper is about to be revealed.

Eventually, Jesus arrives. By then, Lazarus had been dead for four days. The stone is sealed. The mourners are gathered. Hope seems buried with the body. But Jesus walks straight to that tomb and calls out: “Lazarus, come out!” And the man who had been dead walks out of the grave.

But the miracle doesn’t end there. Jesus turns to the people standing around and gives a second command: “Unbind him and let him go.” In other words, resurrection is not only something Jesus does. Rather, resurrection is something the community participates in.

And that may be the most important word for a church in an interim season, because it is not just a waiting room until the next pastor arrives. This season is a time when the congregation asks: What needs to be unbound among us? What grave clothes are we still wearing? What habits or fears or assumptions might be keeping us from fully following Christ? The work of a Pastor Nominating Committee is not just to find a pastor. Their deeper work is to help the church listen for where Christ is calling us next.

Sometimes the bindings are subtle. Churches can become bound by success, and they measure things that seem important: attendance, buildings, and budgets. But Jesus seems far less impressed with numbers and far more interested in people.

Notice Jesus never mentions any of those Big Three. Rather, Jesus talks about healing wounds. Reconciling enemies. Planting seeds of hope in broken ground, and leave the question of growth to God, where it belongs.

Sometimes what binds us is nostalgia. We remember when things felt stronger. Fuller. Easier. But the gospel reminds us that God is not only the God of the past. God is the God of this moment. And if God has placed us here in Franklin, TN, in this season, then there is work for us to do right here.

And here is the surprise of the story. We often think the miracle is simply that a dead man comes back to life. But the deeper miracle is what happens next. Notice that a community gathers around him. Other hands reach out, and his grave clothes are loosened. A community is involved in the bandages falling away.

And once released, Lazarus begins to walk freely again. That is what the church is meant to be. A place where people help each other live freely. As we continue on our way with Jesus through Lent, perhaps the question before us is simple: What would it look like for this congregation to live All Things, Christ?

What would happen if Christ shaped our decisions... our ministries... our relationships... and our hopes for the future? What would happen if everything we did pointed back to the one we follow?

And here is the good news. Jesus is still standing before tombs. He is still calling people by name. He is still saying, "Come out."

And here is the part we cannot miss. Jesus did not unwrap Lazarus. He told the community to do it. Which means the work of resurrection now belongs to the church. The work of Jesus belongs to people like us. People who choose compassion over convenience. People who stop on the road long enough to help someone breathe again. People who loosen the bindings that shame and fear and despair have wrapped around another life.

So today, as we elect a Pastor Nominating Committee and continue through Lent, walking with Jesus, allow me to leave you with this picture. Somewhere in Franklin, TN, right now, someone is standing at the edge of a tomb. Someone is wrapped in discouragement. Someone is bound in grief. Someone is convinced their best days are behind them. And Jesus is already calling their name.

But when they step out of that tomb, they will need someone to help them unwrap their bindings. They will need a church. They will need us. And if we do this and live this way, truly letting Christ shape all we are and all we do as we practice and believe "All Things Christ," something beautiful will happen. People will look at this congregation and say, "I don't know exactly what they do there, but whatever it is I need that, or I want to join in the journey."

And that, my friends, is resurrection in the here and now. That, my friends, is what it means to be on the way with Jesus.

## **John 11:1-16; 38-43**

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So, the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up.”

His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So, then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

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(Verse 38-43) Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

So, they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “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.”

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”