

Lent 5A: Jesus raises Lazarus

What do you think life was like, after all this, for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus?

All new, for sure, but certainly weird, and scary.

With a risen Lazarus hanging around, there'll no more small talk or wasted, careless moments. That "resurrection thing" will always be right there, in every encounter, at the table, in the room, asking them all to live as though it were true and real!

Actually, Martha didn't really want all *that*. She just wanted her old life back, for Jesus to make things again how they were.

He can't, of course, *love* can't. It can't leave things alone and us how we are, because love needs our hearts ever-larger for the more of itself they were made for, and that means change. Love means change.

Let me say that again. Love *can't* leave things how they were and are. It needs to make more and more space for itself, in every heart, in every people, and that means change. Love means change.

Well, she should have been more careful what she asked for, because, Jesus, overwhelmed by all the heartache, within and around him, is ready to do it!

"Roll back that stone!" he says, and then suddenly she goes all "Martha" on him!

There's the stench of the body, of course, a worry and embarrassment. And what's she supposed to do with a bunch of bloody old bandages? And she's got a houseful of people to feed, and frankly, a resurrected body, just now, would pose a bit of a problem.

For all her protests and pleading, death is what Martha prefers. *Death she can deal with.* It's predictable, final, stays put, doesn't ask much. But this? Resurrection? *This will change everything!*

I think we're more like Martha than we want to admit, kind of ambivalent about resurrection, especially ours, because it asks a lot. I mean, death we can live with, and we do! But the possibility of resurrection, well, that changes everything!

I realize this every Easter Sunday, suspecting that, secretly, we're not really quite sure *just what to do with a risen Christ*. And knowing that, come Monday, after the alleluias, we'll mostly creep back to the tomb of that so-called life we settle for, wrapping ourselves again in those death-dealing things like fear, guilt, shame, regret, and unworthiness, that cripple us like a tightly-wrapped useless old shroud.

Which makes about as much sense as Lazarus, getting up from death, stumbling out of the tomb, and saying, "Oh, don't bother, really, I'll just keep the bandages-I'm kind of used to them now!"

Can't you just see him, trying to walk down the street all wrapped up, scaring the children, bandages waving in the breeze, death still clinging like it had won after all?

Nope, Lazarus had to live unwrapped, and so must we, if only we would.

As surely as Jesus led Lazarus out from that smelly tomb, and cut him loose from those crippling rags, God calls each of us up, and out and away from death, holding us, each of us, in life, here and now and forever, asking us to live unfettered, unbound, unwrapped. To shed all our old, dead and deadly stuff like so many useless, smelly old bandages and as though it were true that Christ is risen.

He is. Christ IS risen. Not was, or will be, someday, kinda, maybe, or "it depends on what you mean by 'risen'." Christ's risenness is now, and he takes us up into it every moment, forever. Resurrection is ours now.

How could that change you, if you really believed it? How could *you* live unwrapped, as though it were true that Christ is risen, is risen in you, in fact, even you, and eternity is yours to live starting now?

What sadness, or fear, or grudge, or regret is it time to let go? What new work, unsaid words, or change of heart, or mind, or direction is waiting for the courage of your love? Let it go, say it, do it.

You were made for resurrection. You were made for life, not death, or anything that smells like it. If death has you bound, even a little, picture this:

Jesus, weeping in grief for what you're missing out on, and walking up to death, for you, and shouting it down, doing it down, for you. And calling you forth with that voice that's impossible to resist because of its sound of sweet love. Picture Jesus, himself, his own tender hands unwrapping you from all that binds you, releasing you into the freedom and joy of that death-killing love you were made for and is your life.

There is no kind of death, no matter how big, bad, and mean, that is as strong as his love for you, which is your life, and which asks us to live unwrapped. Dare to do it. Dare to live unfettered, unbound, and unwrapped.

Come forth! He calls to us moment by moment. Dare to live unfettered, unbound,
and unwrapped.