

Smith Memorial Church, UCC
Worship 3/29/20

Prelude

What Wondrous Love

Welcome

- We are delighted by your online presence today!
 - Today we will be talking about Jesus telling Martha and Mary that he is the resurrection and the life before he heals and raises their brother Lazarus even though he had been dead 4 days.
 - During our stay-at-home order, our time of social distancing, separation and isolation, how is Jesus already the resurrection and the life for your spirit, your soul?
 - Brooke Robinson has posted 6 daily quarantine questions that I invite you to consider for your life, your spirit, as the attitude we have, our approach to this time, how we wisely use rather than endure these days, are ways that the resurrection and life of Jesus are already breaking in, bringing light.
1. What am I grateful for today?
 2. Who am I checking in on or connecting with today?
 3. What expectations of normal am I letting go of today?
 4. How am I getting outside today?
 5. How am I moving my body today?
 6. What beauty am I either creating, cultivating or inviting in today?

Passing the Peace--- think of those you greet when we gather for worship, think of those you are not seeing now that you are only at home, think of those on the frontlines for the world, think of those who were already isolated and now are further away, think of those who cannot be safe and socially distant. And let us offer the peace of Christ to all.....peace be with all of you.

Prayer

O God, Creator of heaven and earth, you have created us, you care for us, you watch over us and love us into eternity. When we are faced with challenges beyond our understanding and we feel vulnerable, insecure and anxious, you remind us that you watch over us, you comfort our fears, and above all, you have given us the hope, strength, peace and love of Jesus now and for all time. As we gather now in spirit, yet apart in body, guide us to feel the depths of your presence forever with us, loving us, helping us. Amen.

Hymn #348

Softly and Tenderly

Scripture

John 11: 1-45

Nancy Steen

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and

his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Reflection

The Resurrection and the Life

The bible stories of Jesus spending time with his friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus give us a hint of a more private side of Jesus, of a time when he is away from crowds and the needs of others, a time when he may be relaxing and resting in a way that nurtures him, renews him, just as the time when we relax, visit, gather with our friends and our family. Many gospel stories tell us how Jesus experienced the warmth, love, and hospitality of his close friends, especially during the last weeks of his earthly ministry in Bethany and on the way to Jerusalem.

So it is no wonder that although Jesus has the opportunity to heal his friend Lazarus, he is led to wait until his friend has died and been buried, as John’s gospel tells us, “for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

When Jesus arrives at their home in Bethany, Lazarus’ sisters are grieving, and being consoled by neighbors and friends. Jesus too weeps at the loss of his friend, at seeing Martha and Mary’s grief and pain. The sisters fervently wish that Jesus had been there earlier so that he would heal their brother just as he had healed so many people over the years yet have the faith to see and accept that he will rise again on the resurrection of the last day.

Now here is where the story takes a twist, a turn, a leap, that is unexpected, unprecedented, as even before his crucifixion, death and resurrection, Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Jesus is life, spiritual life, so that death and no time have power in him, with him. He then goes beyond saying that he is the resurrection and the life and shows that he is indeed the resurrection and the life as he comes to the tomb where Lazarus had been laid to rest four days earlier.

As crowds gather Jesus calls Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and without hesitation or delay, Lazarus walks out of the cave, still wrapped in his burial linens. Jesus has the healed, resurrected man freed – freed from the strips of cloth, freed from this death, freed to be reunited with his family and friends.

Friends, this gospel lesson is centuries old, yet brand new for us today. In this time of pandemic, we can see ourselves as Lazarus, see ourselves bound at home, bound away from family and friends, bound away from the life we know, waiting for the stone to be moved away.

We can see that Jesus weeps for us, weeps with us, sympathizing with our grief and our pain.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life, calls us out too. “Come out,” he calls. Come out from fear and anxiety of this time, strip off the burden of panic, let go of hopelessness.

Be freed to be patient, to know that dramatic and traumatic events have happened before in history, and they have passed for new beginnings, new learnings.

Be freed to be mindful of just how precious our health is, and the ways we are protecting it.

Be freed to remember what is most important to do and to be, to help each other, to encourage one another.

Be freed to remember what is of value and essential, and of that which simply eats up our time.

Be freed to remember that we are all in this together. No cultures, borders, privileges, accents, wealth or possessions matter.

As Lazarus joyfully reunited with his family and friends, as we will again do, there is a newer, deeper recognition of how connected we all are, how important, cherished, loved and valued we all are to one another.

May the peace and the promises of Jesus, the resurrection and the life, be with you. Amen.

Music #84

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Pastoral Prayer

O God, you have always been the help in ages past, and are our hope for years to come. You are our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home. In these days, weeks, months of an increasingly dangerous and deadly pandemic that draws the world together by keeping us apart, we seek to be secure in the shadow of your throne, to know that your loving grace is sufficient to allow us to rest in you.

We hear Jesus calling Lazarus back to life, unbinding him as he is your Son who came into the world to heal, to be the resurrection and life for all your beloved humanity.

O God, our help in ages past, and our help today, we pray for all those that our bound by this pandemic, those who are in the caves of isolation who are weeping and anxious, and those in the tombs of illness, grief, despair, exhaustion and risk. We pray for the whole entire world at this time of fear and illness and overburdened systems.

For those who are sick and those who care for them, that they might be restored to health and receive all that they need this day: *Gracious God, receive our prayer.*

For those who have died, from the virus or any other illness or injury that has taken them from this life, and for those who mourn, that they might know consolation: *Gracious God, receive our prayer.*

For nurses and doctors, and all who work in hospitals and medical care, that they might be sustained with energy for their work and might have all that they need for good patient care. For public health experts, for scientists and bioengineers working to understand the virus and to find treatment and prevention that they might have insight and success, for all those whose work

is essential to keep others safe while putting themselves at risk: *Gracious God, receive our prayer.*

For all those adapting to staying-at-home to be safe and the challenges that bind them, as we have come to realize just how much we love, value and cherish our relationships, how we count on each other, how we miss hugs, presence and affection: *Gracious God, receive our prayer.*

For all who live in care facilities, especially as they are much more isolated and unable to be with their loved ones and are at greater risk for danger, and to those that care for them, especially in light of this pandemic and the increased risk they may be putting on their own safety as they care so lovingly for others. *Gracious God, receive our prayer.*

For all the prayers on our hearts today: *Gracious God, receive our prayers.*

All this we pray in the name of the resurrection and the life, in the words that Jesus taught us to pray.....

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven; Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Offering Invitation

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." It is by his life, death, resurrection that we have and share in the ministries of Jesus with our own lives. We offer our gifts in gratitude to God, and in the spirit of Jesus. Take a moment to think of the gifts of faith that carry you, and the ways in which you then share your gifts with others. Our offering plate is for now a mailbox. But let us gather and collect the gifts and offerings of our hearts.

Prayer of Dedication

Steadfast God, because we know that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and that those who believe in him, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in him will never die, we offer our gifts in grateful thanksgiving. Amen.

Benediction

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." May these words, this promise, free you from the worries and the anxiety that bind you, may you know that Jesus is already the resurrection and the life for your spirit, your soul.

The God of peace be with you all. Amen. (Rom 15:33)

Credits

Music Director: Linda Bissonnette

Lay Reader: Nancy Steen

Flowers given by Nancy Shee in honor of all family birthdays in March

Camera and post production: Monique Kayden

Acknowledgements

Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1989

Worship & Rejoice, Carol Stream, IL, Hope Publishing Company, 2001

Pastoral Prayer adapted from Jemma Allen, an Anglican priest serving in New Zealand and Polynesia, and posted on <https://revgalblogpals.org/2020/02/20/thursday-prayer-covid-19/>