**5th Sunday in Lent “3G”**

***John 11:1-45***

*11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.****2****(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.)****3****So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”*

***4****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.”****5****Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.****6****So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,****7****and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”*

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

***9****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.****10****It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”*

***11****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.”*

***12****His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”****13****Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.*

***14****So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,****15****and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”*

***16****Then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”*

***17****On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.****18****Now Bethany was less than two miles****[***[***b***](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A1-45&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26542b)***]****from Jerusalem,****19****and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.****20****When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.*

***21****“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.****22****But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”*

***23****Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”*

***24****Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”*

***25****Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;****26****and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

***27****“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”*

***28****After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.”****29****When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.****30****Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.****31****When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.*

***32****When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

***33****When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.****34****“Where have you laid him?” he asked.*

*“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.*

***35****Jesus wept.*

***36****Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”*

***37****But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

***38****Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.****39****“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.”*

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

***41****So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.****42****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.”*

***43****When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”****44****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.”*

***45****Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*

When I prepare for a sermon, my first action is to read the scripture and to listen to what it says to me personally.  I let it wash over me as I try to hear what God, through the Word, would say to me. My second reading is different.  I think of this congregation.  I pray for what I believe God would say through the Word to His followers in this corner of the world.  I then read it a second time with you in my heart and mind.  During the third reading I try to focus on the eternal truth of God…the God of all generations of all peoples.  In this reading, God’s Word always humbles and astounds me. I am reminded again that you and I are part of the ongoing story of God.  After I read the scripture in this way, I then look at commentaries and hear what theologians through the years share of the context and translation of the scriptures.  After all of this, I begin to put together the sermon.

This week, as I did my three readings, there were 3 distinct themes that jumped forth in the three distinct readings.  I am calling them the 3G’s!   (*Thanks, youth, for letting me borrow your name*! )

**1.**   **The first theme which I heard in the first reading was GRIEF.**

I must admit, that as I read this scripture, a scripture that was selected long long ago, I was aware of my own intense grief.  I felt like the words took my breath away…much as sudden intense grief does. I was coming from a personal time of loss as a dear uncle of my husband died just two weeks earlier, and the death of my brother only days before. I was in the midst of loss as we packed our home in preparation of our move next week.

So in this first reading, I heard very personally the story…I heard the grief of Mary and Martha, of the disciples, their friends and Jesus.

People respond differently to impending death and even to the reality of death itself.

Some blame others, some are overwhelmed by despair.  Some are numb.  Some are angry.  Some find it hard to breathe, to concentrate, to make any decisions.  Some move into tasks that they can manage, seemingly unmoved by the grief surrounding them.  All are responses to grief.

In our scripture, we see some of these responses.  It begins as Mary and Martha call Jesus and others together as Lazarus becomes very ill.  Some come.  Others do not.  Jesus does not come.

Then we learn that Lazarus has died, and the community gathers.  As Jesus arrives, he is greeted by anger and blame.  “Lord, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

      Do we not say things like this?  *“If only I had been there”… “if only he had  gone to the doctor earlier”….”if only it had been me, and not her, who died”….if only*…. We question God*… “why did you not save my loved one, you could….I know you could….why didn’t you ?”*

When Jesus comes to Bethany, he finds that many people have gathered to comfort Martha and Mary….and they were mourning.

Mary was weeping.

The scriptures said Jesus wept.

Grief was powerfully evident.

I appreciate this first theme…GRIEF….for when we know loss and sorrow, Grief, in its variety of forms, washes over us….like a wave…sometimes like a tidal wave.  It stops us.  It slows down the normality of our lives.  It intrudes, no matter what is happening in our world, and it is just not business as usual.

I believe the Scripture today honors that.  It honors our individual need to grieve.  It honors as a community our need to grieve.

Jesus wept.  And so do we.

**2. The theme which I heard in the second reading GRACE.**

The second time I read this, another theme came to me as I read it through the lens of thinking about the heart of this church.  The second G is GRACE.  Jesus could have been angry with Martha.  He could have been angry with Mary.  Both had come to him separately crying…*if only you had been here*.  There were others in the crowd, his disciples who just did not understand WHY he responded as he did.

The scripture says *“could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

And the response of Jesus is also recorded: *“Jesus, was deeply moved”.*

What Jesus offered to those who were responding in their grief was GRACE.  He did not scold.  He did not lash back.  He did not justify.  He was **moved**.  He wept. Perhaps it was his compassion that led him to tears. He responded in LOVE to their hurt.  He did not look away, but wept with them.

I remember times in which I have chosen to run rather than weep because I did not want to get involved. I have even watched whole communities run to keep from weeping. It is all too easy to look the other way when the scenery gets sad.

Frederick Buechner once said that it would help us all if we would keep track of the times and events in our lives that bring tears to our eyes*. “They may be happy or sad moments. It may be the occasion of a funeral or wedding or a patriotic event, when the flag goes by or "Taps" is played. It may be at an unexpected time or place. But, whenever you are stirred to such depths, these are times that God is at work in your life. These are the emotional hot spots in our lives, when something breaks through the veneer of hardness in which we tend to entomb ourselves. These occasions are like windows through which the light of God's love gets in to us. How quickly most of us close those windows of weeping for fear someone will see us when we are not in control. But, when we slam those shutters back over the windows we cut off God himself*.”

Check times and places where you weep, said Buechner, and perhaps you will see the places where God was getting through to you.

As Jesus wept, God’s Grace of acceptance broke through.

In our own lives, as we experience Grief, we also desperately need to experience Grace. Jesus knew that.  He modeled that.

**3.  Finally, the theme which I heard in the third reading GLORY.**

In my third reading, I listened for the Word of God to break over the lives of the generations.  And the glory of God was so evident.

Glory…praise, honor, rejoicing….there is SO, SO much to rejoice about in this scripture.

We have a God who knows us, who weeps with us, who comforts us, who calls us forth from our brokenness and our tombs into new life;  a God who brings us salvation and gathers us into eternal life.

His Glory means involvement.  It means we participate in His Glory.

Did you catch the involvement piece of the scripture?  When Jesus brings Lazarus forth from the tomb, he thanks God for hearing him, and he calls Lazarus by name.  *Lazarus, come out!*

THEN, Jesus instructs the people gathered to *“unbind him”.*

It is WE, the community who participate in God’s Glory.  It is we who choose to see and to believe that can touch those who are still bound around us. May we seek to Glorify as we go to participate in His Glory in the places we live and work.

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