

## He Still Does

John 11:1-45

This morning's lesson from John 11 is a powerful reminder to those of us who struggle in life. Remember it with me. Mary and Martha live in the town of Bethany. They are two of Jesus' closest friends. They send word to him that their brother, Lazarus, is desperately ill. "Please come. We need your help. Hurry. He's sinking fast."

When Jesus gets there, Lazarus has died and has been in the grave for four days. Mary and Martha come out to meet Jesus and say: "He's gone. We've lost him. O Lord, if only you have been here, our brother would not have died."

Family and friends have gathered and, deep in sorrow, weep over the loss of their loved one, Lazarus. Jesus feels their pain and Jesus weeps with them. He, too, loved Lazarus, and them, and even though he knows that Lazarus will be raised, he feels their pain and weeps with them.

Jesus goes out to the cave-like tomb and tells them to: "Roll back the stone!" Martha, a bold realist, protests, saying: "But Lord, we can't do that. He's been in the grave for 4 days. By now there will be a terrible odor." Jesus says to her: "Martha, only believe and you will see the power of God."

So they roll the stone away, and Jesus cries out in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!" And incredibly, miraculously, amazingly, before their very eyes... Lazarus walks out of the tomb. He still has on his grave clothes, wrapped head and tow in mummy-like bandages. Jesus then turns to the friends and family and says to them, "Unbind him, let him go. Unwrap him, set him free."

I am struck by three lessons, three take-aways in this reading. Great truths that rise to the surface that are helpful to and perhaps to you. Let me list them for us: Jesus wept with those he loved - he still does. Jesus raised people up - he still does. Jesus included others in the healing process, - he still does.

**First, Jesus wept with those he loved – he still does.** John 11:35 – it's the shortest verse in the Bible: Jesus wept. That verse served me well in Sunday School. If you could quote a verse of scripture, you'd get a gold star by your name on the big chart on the wall. This was my star-producing verse! "Jesus wept."

A young ministerial student was working as a summer intern. One Sunday morning it was his responsibility to take the lead in Communion. He'd never served communion before and was a little nervous. Fortunately, the pastor of the church used a script for communion that started with the Invitation to Communion, followed by the Prayer of Confession and then the Prayer of Consecration.

All of this was on a laminated card placed on the communion table by the worship committee as they set out the communion elements. The pastor assured the intern that the card would be on the table, and would lead him through the communion liturgy.

The intern did a fine job, reciting the Invitation to Communion, followed by the Prayer of Confession and the Prayer of Consecration. He turned the laminated card over and panicked. There, on the back, at the top, were these words: "Hear these words of comfort from the scriptures." And there was nothing else.

There was a blank there on the communion card so that the minister in charge could, at that point, quote a favorite verse. So the intern read the statement, "Hear these words of comfort from the scriptures..." and then paused. Not only was the script blank,

but so was his mind. He couldn't think of a thing to say. A long pause ensued, and then he blurted out the only verse he could think of at the moment: "Jesus wept."

He felt like a dismal failure for the rest of the worship service, wondering how or why he thought he could be a pastor. But after worship, one of the members approached him and said, "When you quoted that verse, 'Jesus wept,' that was so meaningful. Because it helped me realize that... the Healer of my pain is the feeler of my pain!"

Jesus wept with those He loved, - He still does. He hurts with us. He feels our pain. When we suffer, and we all suffer, scripture promises us that our Lord suffers with us and loves us through it. Jesus wept with those he loved - he still does.

**Second, Jesus raised people up – he still does.** Southern Baptist preacher Dr. D. L. Dykes says that when he was a student pastor he wanted to do things right. So each time he was called on to do something new, he would go to the Bible and find out how Jesus performed that ministerial task and learn from Him.

All went well - until he had to do his first funeral. Dykes discover that Jesus never performed, only resurrections! Which is what Jesus does here in John 11. Jesus raises Lazarus up and brings him out of the tomb. "Lazarus, come forth," he says.

Notice how personal this is! How Jesus calls him by name. Notice that Jesus still does this today – still calls people by name, still raises people up.

He has a resurrection for you. He wants to bring you out of your tomb - whatever it is – that thing in your life that continues to imprison you. That job you hate, that person you loathe, that task before you, that attitude that corrupts you, that mindset that beholds you, that fear that grips you, that self-doubt that cripples you.

Whatever it is- that thing in your life that continues to imprison you - He wants to set you free. And he has the power to do it. If you will just quiet your own voice, hear his call and respond in faith. He will raise you up and give you a new start, a new chance, a new life.

**Lastly, Jesus included other people in the healing process – he still does.**

Don't miss this now. Notice what happens when Lazarus comes out of the tomb. Jesus turns to his family and friends and says, "Unbind him and let him go. Unwrap him and set him free."

It's amazing to me that some people think the small group movement is a new thing. Small groups, support groups, are as old as the Bible, and are so essential to growth in Christ. Jesus knew how important it was to have family and friends help us, surround us with love, support us in our lives, encourage us in our struggles, set us free in every moment, especially in those dramatic moments when we're striving to make a new start with our lives.

I remember the time a man stopped by to see me. He had gone through a great personal tragedy, but he is coming through it with the help of God and with the help of the church, especially his Sunday School class. He said, "I was devastated. I was disillusioned and defeated. There was no hope for the future and no relief for my pain that I could see.

I was so hurt that I was immobilized. All of life had drained out of me. But God brought me back to life, and this church has been there for me every step of the way. My Sunday School class has been so incredible. I don't know what I would have done without them. I couldn't have made it without them."

You know what he was saying? He's saying, "God brought me out of the tomb, and my friends helped me and supported me and together, by the grace of God, they loved me back to life.

Jesus wept with those he loved, - He still does. He raised people up, - He still does. He included others in the healing process... - He still does.

This is the Good News of the people of God, for the people of God, on this last Sunday in Lent. Brace yourself. Easter's on the horizon. Where we, people resurrected from our own deaths, celebrate the risen Christ. What a day that will be!