

**Sunday January 31
A Return to Life
John 11:38-44**

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."

Good Morning My sisters and brothers in Christ. If I sound excited, if I sound a bit rushed, if I sound like I have some good news to share then you are hearing me correctly. I am excited about what God is doing in this church! I get a rush every time I think about all that is possible when we are willing to open our hearts and our heads to something new. I sound like I have good news to share because I do! God is doing a new thing in this place and I am happy, grateful, and blessed. If you are able to be excited, happy, grateful, and/or blessed with me I invite you to stand on your feet and praise Him. Praise Him for He and He alone is worthy of all praise!!

This morning we have been blessed with the leadership of our Kingdom Seekers in worship. Somebody ought to say Amen. They are **our** young people and they are worthy of our support, applause, and praise.

If you are reading your daily bible reading which is printed in the bulletin and on the website – if you are attending adult Sunday School or following the International Sunday School Lesson from another source you know that during the month of January we have looked at four different relationships:

- Jacob, Rachel and Leah
- King Solomon and an unnamed woman
 - Hosea and Gomer
- Unnamed Bride and Groom of the Wedding at Cana

In each of these relationships we were reading and considering the story as presented **then** looking for the application that applied **to us here in the 21st century**. (The sermons for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Sunday are on the website if you desire to review them.) This week we are being asked to consider another relationship: the relationship that Jesus had with Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus.

At first glance it would appear that the first four lessons are about relationships between men and women in the bonds of marriage and therefore they do not have a connection at all to the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. But if you look a bit closer, you may see that all of these stories are held together under the theme of "What We Encounter with God."

With God there will be times when **we run out of something and we have to run to God**. With God there will be times **when God asks us to do something that does not make any sense to us, but we must trust that it makes sense to God**. With God there will be **love that defies explanation but we must nurturer it in order for it survive**. With God **we will have the power to overcome lies and deceit and live the life God had provided** from the foundation of the world.

Today we are challenged to prayerfully search for applications from Lazarus being raised from the dead and what that can tell us about what we will encounter with God. If you are still tracking with me I invite you to pray about

WHAT CAN HE DO FOR ME?

Shall we pray?

God of heaven and earth, God who knows all, sees all and is in all, God who is the Alpha and the Omega the beginning and the end we come to you this morning asking you to speak to our hearts, our heads, and our hands. We say that we can do all things through you because you give us the strength. We say that all things work together for good according to your purpose. We say that we have given ourselves away so that you may use us. We say that we are available to you. Now Father, we come asking that you help us to keep the words that we speak from being lies. Help us to be and do and see and act like the people we say we are. Help us to live the lives we sing about in our songs. Abba, I need you this morning. I am excited about you and what you are doing in our lives. Slow me down Lord, move me as you wish me to move, make me ever more receptive to your speaking and leading and teaching. Help me to preach your word and not worry about anything else. In name of your blessed Son, Jesus the Christ we pray. AMEN and AMEN.

WHAT CAN HE DO FOR ME?

The other three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke do not report the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Their gospels, their good news, centers on the life of Jesus in and around Galilee. But John writes his gospel, his good news with this purpose in mind:

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these

are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.¹

Therefore, it makes sense that John would share this story with us for it tells of another encounter we will have with Jesus when we declare that He is Lord!

Our scripture begins with Jesus arriving at the tomb, but I am going to back up a few verses as I think it will help to clarify the point.

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."

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."

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

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."

¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+20&version=NIV>

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.”

That is the background to the passage in front of us. Now allow me to begin to lead you to the answers to the question I raised as our theme:

WHAT CAN HE DO FOR ME?

Teaching Point #1	Jesus is not going to do what you can do and should do
Teaching Point #2	All that Jesus did and all that we do should be for the glory of the Father
Teaching Point #3	Jesus Loves You and Me

1 Jesus is not going to do what you can do and should do.

a. **“Take away the stone,”**

you have to move the **stones** that keep you from hearing Jesus

what are your stones: my way or the highway

it has always been done this way
in my day...

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

c. **Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”**

what has you too wrapped up and tied up to follow Jesus

are you too wrapped up by your stuff
are you too wrapped up by your social life?
are you too wrapped by trying to acquire more
what do you need to take off
your negative attitude
your desire to stand out rather than blend
your desire to prove someone else wrong

who or what do you need to tell "let me go"
that negative relationship
that bad, illegal and dangerous habit
the habits born of boredom

2. Glory of God

Now if we are honest I think we can all say that at one time or another we have had a pity party. My friend the Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle says that when he was diagnosed with cancer he asked God, "why me?" And not only did he ask why me, but he went on to tell the God of the universe all that he, Marvin, had done to serve God and when Marvin was done he had to come to grips with another question "why not me?"

Dr. McMickle survived his bout with cancer and since then has authored 8 books on preaching, pastoral care, and working in the church. He became the 12th president of Colgate Rochester Divinity School and is still a sought after workshop leader, preacher and

teacher. He is from Chicago and completed his BA at Aurora University.

God can and will use what He chooses to bring you to Him and teach you that all things can be used for His glory.

Genesis 50:20 (NIV)

²⁰You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Romans 8:28 (NIV)

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.²

3. Jesus Loves

when Mary and Martha doubted what he could do after their brother had died **he loved them**

when the disciples thought he should be afraid of what the Jews might do when he returned to Bethany **he loved them**

when they wept and wailed not with feeling, but because it is the custom **he still loved them**

It is then safe for us to arrive at the conclusion that Jesus loves us.

We have doubted,
we have been afraid,
we have faked it hoping that somehow we will make it.

We have tried to get Jesus to move on our timetable.
We have asked Jesus "where were you, when I needed you.
We have turned to others for comfort.

² <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+50%3A20%3B+Romans+8%3A28&version=NIV>

We have not listened when Jesus spoke to us plainly.
We have quoted scripture without understanding the meaning
We have failed to believe

WHAT CAN HE DO FOR ME?

Teaching Point #1	Jesus is not going to do what you can do and should do
Teaching Point #2	All that Jesus did and all that we do should be for the glory of the Father
Teaching Point #3	Jesus Loves You and Me

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.³

³ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8&version=NIV>