

Gospel and Sermon Transcript -5th Sunday in Lent - March 22, 2026

00:01

[Music]

00:09

I hope you'll pardon the irony that the last guy in the door is the one welcoming

00:14

you here. That just maybe that seems weird, but I guess I'm the guy in front so I

00:22

get to do that, so we're delighted you're here. As we move into this final Sunday

00:29

into the final Sunday.

00:29

In Lent.

00:32

We are gifted with a scripture of the story

00:35

of the raising from the dead of Lazarus,

00:38

which very much prefigures the resurrection,

00:42

which we celebrate in just a couple of weeks.

00:49

I think I'll say this now,

00:51

and then maybe that will make room for some other things

00:55

to say as the sermon unwinds,

00:58

unwinds, I was going to say something else, but unwinds, unravels. Sorry about that.

01:05

But here is what I would like to say by way of preface. That the Gospel Day is lengthy,

01:11

so you may want to be seated as we read, but it's striking that it is lengthy as a very

01:17

long run up to the actual resurrection. I think if you count the verses where Lazarus

01:22

actually is raised, a couple verses. I have a feeling that John wasn't just sort of shifting

01:29

weight from foot to foot because there was nothing better to do. There must be some reason

01:33

for that lengthy prologue to the resurrection, which might explain why the sermon ran long

01:40

at Port Colburn this morning. But there is one question that I would like you to begin

01:46

to live with now that will become very much a part of our conversation later

01:52

today and that is where is God in the suffering? Where is God when you can't

01:59

quite differentiate between life and death because both seem so very present

02:05

in the same moment.

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 11th chapter.

02:49

And again, if you would like to sit during the reading, you are welcome to do that.

02:57

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her

03:04

sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and

03:09

wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters

03:16

sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, the one whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard

03:25

the news, he said this illness does not lead to death, rather it is for God's

03:30

glory so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Accordingly, though

03:37

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus

03:42

was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place he was. Then after this, he said to

03:48

the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." And the disciples said to him, "Rabbi,

03:56

there are Jewish leaders just now trying to stone you to death and you want to go

04:01

there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not 12 hours of daylight? Those who walk

04:08

during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. But

04:18

After saying this, Jesus told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, and I am

going there to awaken him."

04:28

The disciples said to Jesus, "Well, Lord, if he's fallen asleep, he'll be all right."

04:33

Jesus, however, had been speaking of his death, but they thought he was referring merely to sleep.

04:40

Then Jesus told them, plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

04:46

"For your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe, but let us go to him."

04:54

Thomas, who was called the twin, said to his fellow disciples,

04:58

"Let us also go that we may die with him."

05:04

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

05:10

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jewish people had come

05:18

to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming,

05:25

she went and met him while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here,

05:34

"My brother would not have died, but even now,

05:38

"I know that God will give you whatever you ask."

05:42

And Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again."

05:48

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again

05:51

"in the resurrection on the last day."

05:55

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.

06:01

"Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.

06:05

"And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

06:10

"Do you believe this?"

06:12

And she said to him, "Lord, yes, I believe that you are

06:15

"the Messiah, the Son of God,

06:17

"the one coming into the world."

06:20

And when she had said this,

06:22

she went back and called her sister Mary

06:24

and told her privately,

06:26

"The teacher is here and is calling for you."

06:30

And when Mary heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

06:35

Now Jesus had not yet arrived at the village,

06:38

but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

06:41

Those who were with Mary in the house consoling her

06:44

saw her get up quickly and go out.

06:47

They followed her because they thought

06:49

she was going to the tomb to weep there.

06:53

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him,

06:58

she knelt at his feet and said to him,

07:01

Lord, if you had been here,

07:03

my brother would not have died.

07:07

When Jesus saw her weeping

07:09

and those who came with her also weeping,

07:11

he was greatly disturbed in spirit,

07:14

deeply moved and he said, where have you laid him?

07:18

And they said to him, Lord, come and see.

07:22

And Jesus began to weep.

07:28

And so those onlookers said, "See how he loved him?"

07:31

But others said, "Could not he who opened the eyes

07:35

of the blind person have kept this man from dying?"

07:40

Then Jesus, again, greatly disturbed, came to the tomb.

07:44

It was a cave and a stone was lying against it.

07:48

Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

07:52

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said,

07:54

"Lord, already there is a stench

07:57

because he's been dead for four days.

08:01

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you

08:04

"that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

08:08

So they took away the stone.

08:11

And Jesus looked upward and prayed,

08:14

"Father, I thank you for having heard me.

08:17

"I knew that you always hear me,

08:20

"but I have said this for the sake of the crowd

08:23

"standing here, so that they may believe

08:26

"that you sent me."

08:29

When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice,

08:33

"Lazarus, come out."

08:37

The dead man came out, his hands and feet

08:40

bound with strips of cloth, his face wrapped in a cloth.

08:45

And Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go."

08:52

Many of the people, therefore, who had come with Mary

08:56

That seeing what Jesus did, believed in Him.

09:01

The gospel of our Lord.

The Sermon

09:16

and peace to you from the giver of life.

09:30

There are a couple of features of this gospel. One I've made reference to and

09:34

that is the amount of time devoted to the actual resurrection of Lazarus. The

09:42

The other is that Lazarus doesn't have a speaking part.

09:49

Can't you help but wonder about poor Lazarus?

09:55

I mean, think about when we're asleep, asleep.

09:58

If you've had a deep enough sleep and you wake you,

10:00

where am I?

10:01

You're a bit disoriented.

10:02

Maybe you don't know the time of day

10:04

or if you have awakened from anesthesia after surgery,

10:09

you might be a little disoriented

10:11

because of the medications that you were given.

10:16

But here's Lazarus, dead for four days,

10:20

dry bones like an Ezekiel dead.

10:25

I love what the writer, Frederick Beekner,

10:28

a pastor, liked to say about Lazarus.

10:33

Frederick Beekner was a bit cheeky

10:34

in the way he presented things,

10:36

and I think that was to disarm us,

10:37

to get us thinking a little bit more,

10:39

and to really absorb the scripture.

10:45

He says, "Poor Lazarus, when he answered Jesus voice

10:50

and came stumbling out of the tomb,

10:52

he didn't know what side of death he was on."

11:01

I wonder if maybe we are the same.

11:05

We don't really know what side of death we are on

11:08

despite the fact that if a nurse came and did our vitals,

11:12

they would probably read okay.

11:19

But let me tease that out just a little.

11:23

First day of spring, we're all supposed to be happy

11:25

and the sun's supposed to be shining

11:27

and where are those tulips?

11:29

We're not feeling it.

11:32

Also, the conclusion of Ramadan,

11:35

which marks a new year, a fresh start, hopefulness,

11:40

or for the people of Iran who celebrate a new year as well.

11:44

Now what's, I believe it's pronounced.

11:49

Yesterday's online article from the BBC said,

11:53

"People reported not being able to smell the new year."

11:58

And what they meant by that was that,

12:00

among other things, this celebration entails

12:03

spreading its table with seven different items,

12:06

many of them fragrant and calling to mind things like

12:12

hope, newness, new beginnings, life.

12:18

Well, when the stench of death is so predominating

12:22

from the petrol that is spent from the missiles

12:26

that have fallen and the ones that are being

12:30

issued from a place,

12:32

What else are you going to smell but the stench of death?

12:42

And this scripture that we heard read today

12:46

puts us into that very awkward intersection between death

12:51

and life and life and death.

12:54

The fact that Jesus raises Lazarus,

12:56

at least by John's accounting, is the very thing

12:59

that's going to get him killed in not too many days.

13:07

But there are questions about where life begins and ends and where death begins and ends.

13:14

And I think that's why John takes such pains to take us through this journey

questioning,

13:19

"Well, Lord, if you had been here, death wouldn't have come knocking."

13:27

And yet it does.

13:30

So where is Jesus in all of this besides being avoidably detained?

13:42

He's there as he looks into the faces of his dear friends when they say, "Lord, if you'd

13:46

have been here."

13:52

But where is Jesus?

13:55

Not geographically now.

13:58

How about spiritually?

14:00

Where have you laid the body?

14:02

Where is my friend?

14:07

And the response is telling, come and see.

14:14

This might remind you of opening chapters of John's gospel.

14:18

And I think that phrase, come and see, is quite intentional.

14:25

Jesus, where do you live?

14:26

Who are you?

14:27

What are you about? What do you stand for?

14:30

Jesus says to them, "Come and see. Come and experience."

14:38

It's not GPS. It is, "This is the life that Jesus lives."

14:45

Where is my friend? Where is Lazarus?

14:48

"Come and see."

14:52

Not three rows down and over.

14:56

come and see, come and experience this.

14:59

Wander into the stench of death.

15:01

Absorb the reality that your friend is gone.

15:06

And Jesus begins to weep.

15:12

John's Gospel records three times where Jesus weeps.

15:16

This is the first.

15:18

The second is as he's lamenting the city of Jerusalem.

15:25

A people oppressed, a people without direction,

15:29

and a people maybe not even wanting help.

15:32

He says, how I long to envelop and embrace you

15:36

in a protective embrace the way a mother hen

15:40

would bring in her chicks,

15:42

but you don't seem to want that either.

15:49

The third time Jesus weeps is in the garden

15:51

as he confronts his fate.

15:54

the one that he knows is coming.

15:55

He's already been betrayed,

15:58

and the soldiers' footsteps can almost be heard

16:01

in the distance.

16:05

And so, it may well be that Jesus is with us

16:10

in the suffering, even as he suffers and as he weeps.

16:19

And where do we see Jesus?

16:24

Mary and Martha have their own experience. Lazarus has his as do all the onlookers of

16:31

where do they see God's mercy? Where do they see God's life-giving ways? How about us?

16:46

Do we know where to look?

16:49

Yeah, I'm smirking like I know.

16:54

But think about the Psalm for a moment,

16:56

that line that we read together about the watchman

16:58

watching for mourning.

17:00

And consider this story of watching for the presence of God.

17:07

My dad was a sailor in the US Navy,

17:10

and he had stories, some of them quite colorful,

17:13

But this one, I thought, painted a wonderful word picture.

17:16

He talked about his job of standing watch at night,

17:21

like watching for the morning to come.

17:26

Standing watch is boring, which is why he took up smoking.

17:33

And fortunately, there was a big thermos of coffee

17:35

not far away, so he could have that too.

17:39

So there he be, standing watch night after night,

17:42

Smoking those government issued cigarettes

17:44

that they were told were good for you

17:45

and would boost troop morale.

17:47

Oops, that was a digression.

17:49

And drinking that military coffee.

17:53

But he remembered his training as a person keeping watch.

17:57

He was told when you are watching even at night,

18:01

you're looking for patterns.

18:04

You're looking for disruptions on the horizon.

18:09

See where I'm going with this?

18:12

As we watch for God's presence, it might not come rushing in.

18:16

"Oh God, if only you'd been here, this mess wouldn't have happened."

18:20

But maybe out on the horizon there are patterns that are being disrupted by the very breath

18:27

of God.

18:29

How about...

18:34

Preaching professors will cringe when I do this, and I'm going to do it anyway.

18:40

pattern disruptions are pretty common in Matthew's gospel.

18:44

See how I just jump from one gospel to the next, you're not supposed to do that in a

18:47

sermon.

18:50

But these pattern disruptions take the forms of things like people yearning for justice

18:57

in God's rule and realm in the world the way God would have it be of doing justice and

19:03

loving kindness and walking reverently with God.

19:07

Blessed are those who mourn.

19:10

Blessed are those who actively wage peace.

19:16

Think about people who have taken to the streets

19:19

to call for human rights, name the country, almost.

19:26

Blessed are those who wage peace.

19:29

Aren't those disruptions of the pattern?

19:32

Aren't those maybe presence of God?

19:39

And finally, I'd like to take us to that bit of conversation

19:42

between Jesus and Martha.

19:47

To believe is not to say, well, I accept as something

19:52

I can check off as verifiable fact.

19:57

Belief is a lot more like what happens

19:59

when you're at the altar, when you're getting married.

20:05

It's a lot like looking into the eyes of your children.

20:08

It is a lot like looking into the eyes of your parents

20:13

and trusting and living.

20:15

That's what belief is in John's gospel.

20:20

And so Jesus asks Martha, can you look into this?

20:26

Can you look into this person of Jesus

20:29

and accept that not only is there hope for resurrection

20:34

coming, but in the here and the now, this very moment, when Jesus says, "I am the resurrection

20:42

and the life."

20:48

The "I am" is quite a powerful phrase.

20:57

And as I say this, I'm going to look at you for just a quick second.

21:02

I got out of Hebrew by the skin of my teeth.

21:04

So this next part, I'm only doing secondhand.

21:08

Okay.

21:10

But my rabbi friends tell me

21:12

that one of the names for God, Yahweh,

21:15

if it's said properly,

21:17

sounds a whole lot like human breathing.

21:20

Breathing in, breathing out.

21:24

So when Moses wants to know

21:25

who sends me on this liberation mission,

21:30

The bush burning breathes, "I am."

21:36

I will be who I will be.

21:37

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.

21:41

I am.

21:43

And now Martha, wondering what's to become of her brother,

21:47

wondering what's going to become of her,

21:52

hoping and living faithfully in a time some day,

21:57

As Jesus say, "I am."

22:03

I am.

22:07

So what if, what if in our suffering

22:10

and in our angst about suffering,

22:18

what if God is there in the calling us by name,

22:21

the calling us to life,

22:25

and maybe even in the nearness of our own wrath.

22:33

Now, amen.