

Sunday 4 May 2025
Evensong for the Third Sunday of Easter

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Isaiah 38:9-20
Gospel: John 11 (17-26) 27-44

I sometimes say to couples when I celebrate their wedding that they bring strengths and weaknesses to their marriage, and they need to work together to bring out the best in each other during their married life. They are to bring the love of Jesus to each other and help each other to grow to become who God has called each of them to be. In the same way, we may bring strengths, weaknesses, and hurts with us to our worshipping community at church. Just like a couple embarking upon marriage, we too are called to allow the Lord to work in our lives transforming us so that we become who he has called us to be.

In the Gospel this evening when Jesus had finished praying, he said, "*Lazarus, come out!*" (John 11:43). Jesus says to each of us also, "*Come out of your tomb. Do not live in the darkness, live in the light. Do not live in fear, live in faith.*" When Lazarus came out of the tomb, Jesus then said, "*Unbind him, let him go free.*" Jesus also says to each of us, "*Be unbound and go free. Live with my life.*" (John 11:44)

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead physically in his body. He had been dead four days. Jesus had previously raised the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41-42,49-56) and the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17) and in the Old Testament Elijah and Elisha raised people from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:17-37). But nowhere is there an example of someone being raised from the dead after four days. This is the crowning miracle of Jesus' ministry. In fact, in John's Gospel, it becomes the main reason leading to Jesus' death, (John 11:45-53). If Jesus can restore a body that had been in the tomb for four days and has begun to decompose, he can certainly mend the brokenness and wounds of our lives.

Jesus said to Martha: "*I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, even if he dies will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26). Jesus asks the same question of us also, "*Do you believe this? Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life? Do you believe that I can mend all the brokenness and wounds of your life? Do you believe that I not only offer you resurrection in the future but also the fullness of life now in the present?*" Jesus proclaims that he is both the *resurrection* and the *life*. He promises future resurrection but also invites us to share *now* in the *fullness of his life*. The resurrection of Lazarus is not just a promise about the future of each of us. It is also an invitation from Jesus to enter into the fullness of his life in the present, right now, and that life will continue in us after death:

*I am the resurrection and the life,
Whoever believes in me, even if he dies will live,
And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.
Do you believe this? (John 11:25-26)*

Do you believe that Jesus calls you to enjoy the fullness of his life now? Do you believe that Jesus is now calling you out of any tomb you may be in? Do you believe that even now Jesus is saying to you, "*Be unbound and go free?*" Accept Jesus' invitation, walk out of any tomb we may be in and allow ourselves to be unbound and go free.

How do we achieve this freedom? How do we get out of our tombs? Notice that Martha and Mary sent a message to Jesus. We too have to send a message to Jesus, and we do this by spending time with Jesus in prayer and sharing with him our wounds, hurts, and anxieties. One of the psalms says, *"I kept it secret and my frame was wasted."* (Ps 32:3) Keep no secrets from Jesus but lay everything before him. That is the only way to achieve a mature relationship with Jesus.

Yesterday is the same as today for Jesus, as we share our wounds and anxieties with Jesus, we ask him to walk back in time with us to that moment of wounding and to heal it. Then Jesus calls us out of the tomb to new life. When Jesus received the message about Lazarus' illness he stayed where he was for two more days. We expect God to answer prayer in our time but sometimes God's time is different to ours. Sometimes we may be tempted to despair and say God cannot do anything for me but that is like Martha in the Gospel who objected to the stone being removed. Jesus replied, *"Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?"* (John 11:40) Jesus is constantly calling us to new life in him, to come away from whatever is keeping us captive. Sometimes a hurt we thought had been healed in prayer may surface again months or years later. This is a grace from God; God is now inviting us to a deeper healing of that situation.

Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, but Jesus himself did not unbind him; others unbound Lazarus. When you meet Jesus in prayer, he calls you out of your tomb and unbinds you. You must begin the process of sending a message to Jesus like Martha and Mary did by spending time in prayer and inviting the Lord into every aspect of your life and then answering his call to come out of the tomb.

Jesus offers us a wonderful invitation and we need to grab this opportunity with both hands. Not only that, but we also need to share the boundless love of Jesus with everyone we meet. Accept Jesus' invitation, walk out of any tomb, be unbound, and go free.

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Mthr Jennifer Brady