

Sermon- Dealing with the Stink Before you can See the Glory

Scripture: John 11:38-44

Sunday, March 17, 2019

In the run up to this point in the story of Lazarus, I preached 4 sermons. The first was about what happens when you ask God for help and you feel God is totally silent as the sisters would have felt when Jesus did not show up. The second sermon was focused on how Jesus prepared all his disciples to go into Judea, when they were really apprehensive about going to a place where people were looking to stone them. The third sermon was Jesus' interaction with Martha and believing who Jesus was. The last sermon was about Jesus' interaction with Mary and focused on bringing your full emotional self into your personal relationship with God. Today, we get to the moment we have been waiting for. The moment when Jesus actually raises Lazarus from the dead. Even though what happens in the end is spectacular, the events themselves are familiar to many. Yet, there are some important Biblical principles in the raising of Lazarus that we don't pay enough attention to and that is what I want to focus on today.

Before we get to the principles let's get the story straight. Our story starts with Jesus arriving at the tomb where Lazarus was buried. We are told that Jesus at this point was deeply moved to the point of being angry. Remember Lazarus like all of us was His fearfully and wonderfully made being whom he had a personal relationship with. To see such a being finished by disease and death is most upsetting to its maker, right? So anyway Jesus arrives at the tomb. But upon arrival Jesus tells the people to roll the stone aside. This of course is a shocking request. Imagine a family friend arriving four days after someone was buried and asks for the deceased person's body to be dug up. Such a request would cause a big commotion in that house, right? Well it caused quite a stir in their world too! One thing you have to appreciate about this situation is that it is always Martha who steps in to deal with what needs to be done. So he comes to Jesus and tries to talk him down. Remember, I told you Jesus was pretty upset when he

arrived at the tomb. Anyway Martha tells Jesus that Lazarus has been dead for 4 days and at this point the body would be a smelling. You see in the Jewish burial customs, there were spices put on the body but this was not to embalm the body like the Egyptians did. Jews did not embalm the body. The spices the Jewish people used was only to mask the smell a little. But the only way to effectively block the smell was by keeping the tomb sealed.

Anyway earlier when Jesus asked Martha if she believed that He was the “Resurrection and the Life” she had said yes without having a clue as to what that meant. Now Jesus tells Martha in front of all the people gathered, *“Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?”* Now when the people hear those words, they are just overcome by its power. So even though they don’t fully understand why Jesus wants them to open the tomb they obey and open the tomb.

Now, its Jesus turn to act. So he starts by looking up and praying specially for the people around him to hear. This is interesting and I want to describe what is going on here carefully. You see, on the face of it, Jesus is doing here what he rebukes the Pharisees for i.e. praying on street corners for other people to see how pious they were. But in the case of the pharisees, the reason why Jesus hated what they were doing was because they did not know God. They were simply faking prayers to maintain their image among the people. Jesus knew what the pharisees where doing because if they were really speaking to God, the message would have come to him 😊 The Pharisees prayers served no spiritual purpose and Jesus hates pretend spirituality. Jesus on the other hand had a real relationship with His heavenly father, He knew the will of His Heavenly Father and He wanted to reveal this relationship to His heavenly father. That is why he prays this prayer. *“Father, thank you for hearing me. ⁴² You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.”* For some Mennonite ears this prayer does not have the kind of humility that we are used to. When was the last time we heard anyone pray “you always hear me Father, but I am

saying these words out aloud for the sake of all these people standing here”. But Biblical humility I described well is *Romans 12:3 (NLT) Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.* So Biblical humility is simply having an honest and realistic assessment of yourself. If what you say about yourself matches reality, and not puffed more than what is true, that is true humility no matter what the words actually are. What Jesus was saying was absolutely true and so he could say, yes “you always hear me Father, but I am praying out aloud for the sake of these people standing around, so that they will believe that you sent me”.

After that short prayer, Jesus shouts, “Lazarus come out”. And the dead man comes out with his hands and feet bound by his grave clothes and his face wrapped with his head cloth. Jesus then tells the people, “unwrap him and let him go!”

With that act, Jesus demonstrated the power he had even over life and death. And when he said he was the Resurrection and the Life, he was showing people that there was a literal meaning to those words. Jesus’ Resurrection power. You better believe it.

But in this sequence of events you see three principles and I want to point them out to you.

The first is that **God acts when you act**. You see, Jesus could have raised Lazarus from the dead without involving any human involvement. He could have just as easily asked the tomb to roll away and it would have rolled away, don't you think so? But this is not the first time he is calling for the people around him to obey before he does anything. He could have turned water into wine without anybody's help. But he does not do anything till the people there fill the jars with water. He could have feed the 12,000 without taking a small boy's lunch. But he does not do anything till he gets the 5 loaves and 2 fish. So also he does not do anything till the people there roll the stone away. In fact from day 5 of the world and from the moment human beings were created the

Bible is always reminding us that we are partners in what God wants to do. We have to do our part and God will do his. **Remember God acts when you and I get off our back seat and do what we need to do.**

The second thing to remember is that sometimes what **God wants us to do is deal with the stink**. In fact think about this. When Jesus was asking the people to open the tomb he was asking them to do something that they would never have done both culturally and by the standards of common sense. Right? Because Martha was right, if you open a tomb on day 4, the body would have started decomposing and the stink would be great. Our tendency is to sweep the dirt under the carpet. To hide the ugliness and not talk about the difficult things in our life. Because it is easy to be in denial or to simply run away from the difficult things of our life. Now I am not saying we should be exposing our dirt to the world all the time. Most people want to live a clean, peaceful and beautiful existence. But here is a principle in life for you. You don't get the benefit of using a clean toilet if you don't clean the toilet. The irony of life is that if you are willing to deal with the dirt in your toilet, then you will get the benefit of a clean toilet. And what is true of your toilet is even more true of life itself. Because toilets you can get someone else to clean. But when deal with life itself, if you want to have a clean life, nobody but you can own up to your mess and deal with it. And it is even more true with God. God never says we are all basically good people walking around doing nice things for everybody. The Bible is very realistic of the stink in our world. Rom 3:23 has a very unflattering view of humanity, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" Apostle Peter in *Acts 2:38 says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* In other words, amazing miraculous things will happen in your lives if you are willing to own up to the stink in our lives and are willing to place them at Christ's feet. Denial of the ugliness in our lives does not help us with God. God will do what he needs to do, but when we do

our part. And sometimes doing our part means dealing honestly with the stink in our lives.

But here is the Good News folks. When we do our part, when we are willing to roll away the tomb and expose what is dead and rotting in our lives to God, He is able to do way more than we can ever imagine. God can forgive what needs to be forgiven, God can heal where healing is required, God can restore where restoration is needed. God can even bring life to what was dead. Even if it has been dead for along time folks! Jesus said it. He is the Resurrection and the power. You see what God did in Lazarus' life was just incredible. Let me explain this concept of time reversal...

When we do our part, God will step in and do something in your lives that is way beyond anything you can expect or imagine. God will be as mind blowing in your life as He was in Lazarus' life.

God does not act until you and I do. God wants us to confront the most difficult, ugly stinky aspects of our life and bring it all to him. When you that, He will step in and call out your name and you will walk out restored and renewed, with new life and new possibilities. This is what it means to experience God's Resurrection power in our lives. I pray that each of us can experience and testify to Christ's amazing power in own individual lives and even for us as a church. Let us pray.