

Raising Lazarus  
John 11:1-44 (selected verses) – March 27, 2022 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC  
Rev. Dr. Cathryn Turrentine

You may remember that when I received my second COVID vaccination, it made me really sick – so sick, in fact, that I had to cancel the worship service the next morning. We were still worshipping by Zoom then, and we were using my own Zoom account. That morning, I was so sick, so far from my normal self, that I couldn't even imagine how to pass off the worship service and the Zoom responsibilities to someone else. I stayed in bed for the next 24 hours.

The next morning, Monday, I felt better. I thought I could eat a little bit, and Dave brought me scrambled eggs. Then I felt so well that I decided it was time to hit the shower and become human again. Full of plans for the day ahead, I went to wash up and make myself presentable. I might even make it into the office by noon!

Twenty minutes later, I was clean as a whistle and thoroughly exhausted. I could hardly lift my arms. I couldn't get dressed, let alone fix my hair. Just taking a shower had used up all the energy I had for the whole day. I couldn't even remember what I had hoped to accomplish that day. It was all I could do to drag myself back to bed, where I stayed for another 24 hours.

There was such a huge distance between how ready my mind and spirit were to get up and get going, and how ready my body was! Getting well, even pretending to be well, seemed like a such a good idea! I thought I was ready. But I just couldn't master it then, and not for several days afterward. My spirit was ready, but my body couldn't pull it off. Has this ever happened to you?

~~~

Now consider Lazarus. He is no longer just feeling poorly, no longer really sick, no longer merely dying. Lazarus is dead and buried. He has been in the tomb for four days. There is a huge stone between him and the living world. There is no more life in him. He is gone.

Those that Lazarus had loved are beginning to process the wound that his death has caused. His sisters have moved from shock and sorrow to anger and blame. Lazarus's sister Mary lashes out at Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" And Jesus, Lazarus's friend, begins to weep as well.

We don't know whether Lazarus's life had been easy or hard. We don't know if the illness that took him at the end was a short one or if he lingered. We just know he is loved and mourned by his family and his friends. And we know that the life he had is over.

And here comes Jesus, calling Lazarus to live again. "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus calls. "Lazarus, come out!"

Jesus is calling him not to the same old life but to a wholly new one, touched by the glory of God. "Lazarus, come out!" Come out of the safety of your tomb! Come out of the darkness that enshrouds you! Come out of your rest, your lethargy! Rise and walk out of that dark tomb into the blinding brightness of a day you thought you would never see! Follow me back into the world, even though your graveclothes still bind you. Get up and follow me. Walk! Run! Dance in the light of God!

I wonder what it felt like to hear that call. Did Lazarus want to hear it? Could he imagine getting up, not out of a sick bed but out of his own tomb, and living again? And was his imagination enough to get him there? How much energy did that take, that rolling over, that rising? Where did the hope come

from that propelled those first steps? Somehow, Lazarus walks out of that tomb, out of darkness, out of rest, out of death. Somehow, Lazarus chooses life.

~ ~ ~

The Gospel of John tells us over and over again that meeting Jesus provokes a choice in us. If we choose rightly, if we choose to walk in the light, rather than in darkness, then we have eternal life, not later, but right now.

When we read this gospel, we are reminded that there is a huge difference between the activities of our earthly life, which may go well or poorly and will always end, and the quality of our spiritual life, which is touched by God and is eternal and unchangeable.

Jesus calls to us, too, to look up from the tasks of this day, to look up from our busy-ness and worry and sorrow, up from spiritual sickness, up from whatever exhaustion or despair we feel, up from the inertia that keeps our spirits earth-bound. Instead, Jesus calls us to lift not just our bodies but our spirits, to live always in the light of the sacred gift of eternal life. "Don't live your life as though you were already dead," he calls to us. "Be alive! Walk! Run! Dance in the light of God!"

Amen