

*Mondovi: Our Savior's, Gilmanton & Montana: Salem United Methodist Churches
3.22.2026, Fifth Sunday in Lent, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.*

Lazarus, Come Out

John 11:1–45

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, pour resurrection life into us through the word we receive today. In the name of Jesus, the Lord of life. Amen.

What is the most important thing for a Christian? And what do we hold on to when it feels like it is already too late? It is faith. The church is a community of faith. But faith has many dimensions. And today, through the story of Lazarus, Jesus invites us into a deeper kind of faith. Not only a faith that believes in heaven someday, but a faith that can see the glory of God even here and now.

In today's passage, everything seems already over. By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. From a human perspective, it is too late. But this is exactly where Jesus begins his work. But what kind of faith is Jesus calling us to in moments like this?

When we first come to believe in Jesus, our faith is simple, like that of a child. We believe that Jesus atoned for our sins, that by trusting in him we become children of God, and that when we die, we will enter paradise. In time, we also come to believe that there is no second death. Our faith grows not only richer in content, but deeper in maturity.

As we go through life and face hardship, a faith that can break through difficult circumstances begins to grow in us. This happens when we are nourished by God's word and receive faith from him. We develop what you might call muscles of faith. In the midst of suffering, our faith can falter, but by the Lord's grace, new faith rises up, and through the experience of breaking through, we catch a glimpse of God's glory. And so, as faith is renewed at a deeper level, we find ourselves experiencing new dimensions of that glory.

God often works through suffering to shape us. It grieves his heart, but without that process, the diamond cannot emerge. This is why our perspective on hardship must shift: we begin to see it as the very place where God's glory is revealed. God does not keep his glory to himself. He invites those who love him to share in it.

Last week, we looked at the story of the man who had been blind from birth. Jesus' perspective on his blindness was not that it was caused by sin, but that it existed so that the glory of God might be displayed through it.

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The same is true of Lazarus's illness today. But this case is even more intense because Lazarus actually dies. The deeper the suffering, the greater the faith required.

And if we are honest, we find that often we lack that faith. We hold the basic beliefs: that a believer who dies will go to paradise, and that there will be a resurrection at the end of the age. Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, were no different.

They sent word to Jesus, saying, "Lord, the one you love is sick." And what did Jesus say? "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." I imagine that this word was sent to Lazarus' sisters. If they truly believed that Jesus didn't speak empty words, shouldn't they also be able to trust that this sickness would not end in death?

The problem, however, was that Jesus deliberately delayed, and in the meantime, Lazarus died. From their perspective, it must have been confusing. It may have seemed like Jesus' word had failed.

By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Jesus told Martha, "Your brother will rise again." But she understood this to mean the resurrection on the last day — not that he would rise at that moment.

Both Martha and Mary said the same thing to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." They had faith for healing, as did the disciples, but they did not yet have faith that he could rise at that moment. Jesus had spoken two things, first, that this sickness would not end in death, and second, that Lazarus would rise again. Neither of these words had taken root in their hearts as genuine belief.

Our unbelief grieves Jesus. It causes him deep sorrow. And yet he also has compassion on us when he sees us dragging ourselves through life in that unbelief, weeping and falling apart. If Martha and Mary had held on in faith to the word Jesus had sent them, if they had reasoned with themselves, "Our brother has died, but Jesus said this sickness would not end in death, so even now he will bring him back, and God's glory will be revealed," might they not have waited for Jesus with expectation rather than dissolving in grief? Perhaps they would not have wept at all, or if they had, only briefly.

But instead, both Mary and Martha, and all the mourning Jews who had come to console them, were full of sorrow through unbelief. And seeing this, Jesus groaned in his spirit. We may find ourselves at exactly this same stage.

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In fact, we may be Lazarus himself, lying in the tomb for four days, already beginning to decay. Just as Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep," we are his friends. But like Lazarus, we can be in a state of death.

What Lazarus represents can take many forms.

He may be someone who believed in Jesus for a time, then stumbled and has been away for a long while.

Or he may be someone who still comes to church, but whose heart is as dark as a tomb, wrapped, like a body in burial clothes, in something negative, with no sense of life or vitality. Bound by words someone else spoke to him, he may have bitterness. Even the best of parents, or the finest of teachers, may have hurt us in some area of our lives because none of them are perfect. Each of us carries our own Lazarus: something in our lives that seems utterly dead beyond hope: a dream, a relationship, a financial situation, or a health crisis.

And here is the deeper truth: the things that belong to our old self, the nature we were born with, are ultimately destined to decay. It is only when Jesus calls us out as new people that God's glory can be revealed through us. If we try to love from our own strength, or endure through sheer willpower and natural temperament, we will eventually burn out. That old self rots. It is only when Christ raises us as new people that we can truly love and persevere in him.

Layer upon layer, one thing after another, we find ourselves so tightly bound that even when Jesus calls us out, we cannot walk properly, just as Lazarus stumbled out of the tomb, still wrapped in his burial clothes. We need someone to help us get free. When Jesus calls a name and summons somebody out of that tomb, he also brings people into their lives to help unwrap what has bound them.

Martha and Mary had no faith for a resurrection to occur at that moment, and Lazarus was decaying in the tomb. The situation looked utterly hopeless, but we need to remember that they were friends of Jesus. He had a glorious plan for his beloved friends. From Jesus' perspective, this was the appointed time for a miracle. He came to them, spoke words to strengthen their faith, and though they did not fully understand those words at that moment, he brought them into the miracle as participants, drawing them into the very act that would demonstrate he is the Messiah and reveal God's glory.

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Whatever suffering you are walking through, I encourage you to trust that God will reveal his glory through it at the appointed time, and to keep your ears open to what the Lord is saying.

We are Lazarus. We are Mary and Martha. But there is another perspective as well: because we are united with Christ, we can also go with him to raise the Lazaruses in our midst.

Through that ministry, God's glory is revealed just as surely.

When Jesus decided to return to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, he said, "Let us go back to Judea." The disciples pushed back, worried: the Jewish leaders were already trying to kill him, and now he wanted to go back there? Healing Lazarus was one thing, but this put Jesus in real danger. And yet here is the lesson for us: even the place you least want to go, even the most hostile territory, if it lies within God's plan, that is where you may witness the greatest miracle.

Judea is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Judah, which means a place of praise. One preacher puts it this way: "If you want the Lion of Judah to move for you, you need to release your Judah, your praise." The Lion of Judah, of course, refers to Jesus. He continues: "Your praise releases the Lion of Judah. Your grumbling releases the devouring lion, Satan himself. Your praise, what comes out of your mouth, determines what goes on around you."

When Moses raised his arms, Joshua prevailed in battle (Exo 17:8-16). When his arms fell, Israel began to lose. Raising both arms is a posture of prayer and praise. And Joshua foreshadows Jesus. When we lift our hands in praise, Jesus wins the battles of our lives.

I personally believe in a literal resurrection, real people being raised from the dead, and I have heard of many testimonies of those who carry that kind of anointed faith. We trust that God appoints the time of each person's death, but I also want us to carry the faith that God still demonstrates resurrection life today.

Whatever suffering you are in, the Lord will come, not on our timetable but on his, and he will bring the glory of resurrection life with him. Let us ask the Lord to give us that faith. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we believe that you have come to us as the resurrection and the life. Call out our Lazaruses: the places trapped in a tomb of limitation, wounds, unbelief, or self-absorption, whether we are aware of them or not. Bless us to become Lazaruses who are made completely new, so that your resurrection life may be displayed through us. And give us the resurrection faith to go with you, Lord, and raise the Lazaruses around us. In your glorious name. Amen.