

Christ Episcopal Church
2 Emerson Street
East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

All Saints Sunday
November 4, 2018

8 and 10 AM Sermons

Sermons by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

“Being Laid Up”

The Holy Gospel according to
John 11:32-44

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Then

Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they

may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Dear God, give us new life. Amen.

Jesus asked Mary and the others,
‘Where have you laid Lazarus?’
Compare that Verse 34 in today’s Gospel
of John Chapter 11 with Verse 13 in the

Gospel of John, Chapter 20, where Mary Magdalene said to Jesus whom she thought was the gardener, ‘I do not know where they laid Jesus.’ And both times the ones who had been laid to rest in a tomb came out.

When we put someone in a tomb, we do not expect them to be disturbed; we surely think we will not see them again in this life; and indeed, we do not expect them to be resuscitated after spending four days in the tomb, as was Lazarus, or to be raised after spending three days in

the tomb, as God lifted his Son Jesus out at his Resurrection.

But to hint at what would be happening to Jesus after his crucifixion, Jesus by his action with Lazarus shows God's power is far greater than death. And Lazarus was called out of his tomb by the Lord just as Jesus will be lifted out of his own tomb by his Heavenly Father.

This act of placing someone in a tomb struck me as a symbol of what others may try to do with our lives, while we

are still living, or sometimes what we do with our own lives.

Have you ever felt put in a ‘cubby-hole’, ‘cubbyholed’, put in a spot where we cannot breathe, where we cannot express our creativity, where someone else expects us to be more or less lifeless?

Far too often in our society, we place people in tombs far too early, I believe. Witness today’s healing of up to half of those diagnosed with lung cancer nowadays. And most of us know someone who has survived other

cancers, and heart attacks, and strokes. Perhaps you heard the story this week on television about a man who realized his father was having a stroke right as he was speaking to him on the telephone. He alerted his mother immediately to call 911 for an ambulance which was able quickly to take his father to the hospital where he was treated and released with no apparent residual effects of the stroke. Isn't it amazing how far medical science has taken us today? And now thousands of people have second chances on life.

But here in this Gospel story, Lazarus was stone-cold dead, just like Jesus will be when Jesus is put in his tomb.

‘Deader than a doornail’, is one expression for it.

But most of us have experienced some sort of at least transient social or psychological or employment death at one time or another in our life. And even churches are sometimes ‘counted out’ by the ‘powers that be’. But we continue to strive for Christ’s kingdom to come in our own time through our church and through our own retraining

and despite the lack of faith others may have in us. Have you ever felt that way?

I remember years ago getting accepted at law school, but my father was dead set against it for some reason. I think he had had too many run ins with lawyers since his specialty was the design of nuclear power plants. The last plant he designed finally came on line exactly 43 years after his death, but several other large ones which he brought into operation are still on line today producing carbon free energy at very competitive prices. But as a result,

I never attended law school, and instead, I discovered seminary.

We have the English phrase, ‘Never say never’, but sometimes we are internally more skeptical, perhaps to the extent that we defeat our own goals and mistrust our God given abilities. It happens.

One problem I have faced is that almost all religious bodies today mandate retirement at certain ages. And there are even hard lines in the sand for Episcopal bishops who are expected to retire by age 65. But nowadays, the

average person lives to their late seventies, and living to one's nineties is no longer that unusual.

Years ago. I recall the advice being given youth was that they could expect to have not only more than a dozen jobs during their lifetimes, but the average person would change their entire career five times. And having experienced the ups and downs of US economies over the past several decades, many of my friends have either retired very early or they have begun brand new careers. It is very common for people to find new

directions for their lives today. And even though I am a late comer Episcopalian, women could not even be ordained when I was confirmed. Now most of the bishop openings have more than one woman candidate, and several dioceses now have women bishops.

And even here at Christ Church, one of the Sunday School children came up to me and said, “I didn’t know men could be priests.” Haven’t things changed?

Technology is also still changing very rapidly. Moore's Law is an observation

made by Intel co-founder Gordon Moore in 1965. It states that roughly every 18 months, the number of transistors that can be squeezed onto an integrated circuit doubles.

<https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/end-moores-law-end-of-computers/>

Our cell phones today have far more computing power than the massive ones used to put a person on the moon in 1969.

Last week I was reading one of the last books the recently deceased physicist Stephen Hawking wrote, “Brief

Answers to Big Questions”. He predicted that soon we will be able to power tiny space ships with laser beams across space. The tinier these little probes are, the easier it will be to accelerate them to near light speed, since their mass expands greatly as they approach light speed. But if we can design nano-sized equipment for space probes, our current lasers could power them quickly across light years of space. At near light speed a nano-craft could travel in a few decades to the nearest star to our Sun, Alpha Centauri, a star system

which has at least one possibly habitable planet orbiting around it.

<https://earthsky.org/space/alpha-centauri-travel-time>

And if our tiny space probe had a nano-sized communications device it could transmit back to earth its findings at light speed and reach us in about four years.

So, the round-trip information from our Sun's nearest star could happen during a human lifetime. How's that for space exploration?

“Proxima Centauri b, an Earth-sized exoplanet in the habitable zone of

Proxima Centauri, was discovered in 2016.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_Centauri

And some predict that in ten years we will have a permanent base on the planet Mars.

<https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/products/mars-base-camp.html>

<https://www.space.com/41935-mars-base-alpha-2028-elon-musk.html>

Also, the science fiction stories of suspended animation of a human for decades during space travel may not be that fictitious after all. And in such a state, humans may one day reach the stars. But, as Stephen Hawking notes, our space travelers would have to live out there in space since they probably could not make the journey back. Our DNA telomeres limit animated human life to about one hundred twenty years, it seems. But maybe we can be ‘laid’ up for more than four days and still be revived at the end of a space journey.

So, we need to begin anew ‘thinking outside of the box’, the box among other things meaning Planet Earth.

Let no one keep us back, put us down, declare us dead. Only God can do that.

The universe is vast, and we have only begun to explore it. But the Kingdom of God is far greater. Let us focus our hopes where God helps us to see beyond our earthbound strictures, beyond the limits others have placed on us, beyond what even we ourselves dared to dream. And remember, love is the one thing that goes beyond infinity. Amen.

Description: Space is not really the final frontier. Love of others is that.

Tags:

Alpha, Centauri, space, love, God, Jesus, Lazarus, light, years, lasers, probe, box, think, suspended, animation, resurrection, resuscitation, planet, sun, star, limit, Mars

St. Alban's Episcopal Church

76 St. Alban's Place

Staten Island, New York 10312

The Fifth Sunday in Lent (A)

April 6, 2014

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“How to find the real Jesus”

The Gospel: John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Laz'arus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his

feet with her hair, whose brother Laz'arus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Laz'arus. So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking

to stone you, and are you going there again?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, “Our friend Laz’arus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in

sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, “Laz’arus is dead; and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” Now when Jesus came, he found that Laz’arus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met

him, while Mary sat in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him,

“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.” When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Then Jesus, deeply moved

again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may

believe that thou didst send me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Laz’arus, come out.” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.

Hear the prayers of our hearts, Dear Lord, as we come to you for new life today. Amen.

Today five of our youth come forward for their First Communion. We met briefly before this service to discuss what was going to happen. For the first time each of them will receive the Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, blessed for them so that they will be a blessing to others and for others. It is a sacred and holy mystery, but one which we older Christians experience every time we receive Holy Communion. It is a bit difficult for us to tell someone exactly what happens when we eat this Holy Meal, and without our faith in the Lord,

it will only be experienced as just another piece of bread or wafer, and another or perhaps the first sip of wine for our young people here on the front pews. Our taste buds try to deceive us, try to trick us into thinking of this as just another tiny little token meal at church, when Holy Communion is the very life-giving food that we yearn for each and every week. We are spiritually resuscitated each time we receive Communion, much like Lazarus was given new life when he heard the voice of Jesus calling him out of his tomb,

calling him back from death, calling him into new life, and finally at his end into eternal life with our Savior, Jesus Christ. When we skip this sacred meal any week, we realize we have missed our yearned-for attachment to the life-giving sustenance from the umbilical cord of Christ that makes us long for his love for us again, and our spiritual lives begin to atrophy when we do miss this sacred and mysterious meal. This very special church meal is not only healing, it is absolutely necessary, it is essential, and we begin to long for it the next Sunday

and the next. Yet Holy Communion is not just a ‘quick fix,’ not simply something that ‘charges us up’ for yet another week, and not even something that only ‘gets us right with God’ for our sins for a brief while, but Holy Communion is a sacred meal that reminds us to show Christ’s love to others during each day and moment of the coming week. Receiving the sacred meal is meant to challenge us to find how to use the Christ we have imbibed to serve and teach others about God’s unending love through God’s Son Jesus

Christ. Jesus did not die on the cruel cross to pacify us and the devil, he died so that through us the devil will be finally and utterly defeated. The sacred meal does not protect us from the devil, instead it gives us the ability and strength to cope with the devil's unending efforts to turn us away from giving Christ's love to others. And if we can corporately as a church find ways during the week to express the amazing miracle of Christ dwelling with us, we put the devil to great shame over and over again. We will be empowered to show love to

others even when we have not received an ounce of love from them. We are not to be doormats, but we are to be Christ-like in our forgiveness, Christ who at times had to escape through the crowd in order not to be stoned. Not everyone will receive our well-intentioned acts of mercy and kindness, but we continue to show Christ's mercy and kindness to others regardless of how they respond.

A number of years ago one of my parishioners in the Bronx asked me to bring Communion to her elderly mother who was dying in the hospital. At her

hospital room when I saw the dryness of her mother's lips and tongue, I sensed this was not going to be a 'normal' Communion; and indeed after I placed the Holy Bread on her tongue, at her first breath the Communion wafer whizzed out of her parched mouth, and on past my ear; she was unable to swallow anything; but her intention was to eat the sacred bread and that was quite enough. The consecrated bread itself does not bring a magical potion into our bodies, it is our intention in remorsefulness for our sins that we receive the body and blood

of Christ to remind us that it was his necessary sacrifice for our sins that matters. It is the new revival in our hearts we get at being able to receive Christ's body and blood or at least in trying to receive it that makes the spiritual change in us. But the reception of the sacred meal itself is so much a mystery that no one can describe exactly what happens to them if it is taken with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. New life occurs; we are brought back out of our tomb; the grave wrappings fall from our hearts; and we are revived, revived,

resuscitated, reinstated, and recreated in Christ's very own image. But if we take the Body and Blood of Christ in a trivial or rote manner, we miss the great blessings that Christ has for us each week.

I was not brought up in a spiritual tradition that received weekly or even monthly Eucharist; it was a Wednesday night once a quarter, every three months, sort of thing. And I often missed it since my parents did not regularly attend Wednesday night services. When I was later in college, faced with a variety of

seemingly great philosophical challenges to my faith, and separated from the fellowship of my home church which was many hundreds of miles away, my spiritual life fell into disarray. I do not know if you have ever experienced such a thing, but it is horribly spiritually debilitating to find one's spiritual life lacking. My whole life seemed to teeter and totter, and my childhood faith just began to dry up and wither. It took some time for me to recover and rediscover, or to discover for the first time, what it means to have access to weekly Holy

Communion, but when I did find that access, and when I availed myself of that sacred meal weekly, my whole life immediately began to revivify and reorganize. It was an incredibly amazing miracle of rebirth that I experienced.

And when I finally found a church that could give me both weekly Holy Communion for my body and mental sustenance with good preaching, I clung to that church like it was life itself, because for me it was life itself. But it took me some time to find the Episcopal Church; I went through the ‘iteration’ of

going to a Congregational Church for the necessary good preaching on Sunday and followed immediately by a Roman Catholic Church for the necessary Communion each Sunday for months. And as I went from one church to the other in Boston one Sunday, I just happened to find a church that had both good preaching and Holy Communion, an Episcopal Church, and I have never left that tradition, ever, by the grace of God. And I have also never looked back, thanks be to God.

So today if this is your very first Holy Communion, or the first Communion when you have found new faith in Jesus Christ, let me strongly commend you to seeking Holy Communion each and every week, with good preaching, without fail. First Communion is only a start, only a bite and a sip of what wonders Christ has in store for your life. The miracles you will find in your life that become simply commonplace will amaze you; your life will never be the same again.

But be sure to take this Holy Meal when you are prepared to shed and confess your past sins, and to stay away from those sins from now onwards, with the Spiritual Power that God will give you today. Do not take eating the sacred bread and drinking from the sacred cup lightly.

But eat the bread, the Body of Christ, and sip the wine, the Blood of Christ, as this will be your path to God's wonderful grace and greater glory for the rest of your life, now and forever.

Amen.

