

Grace and Peace...

Seldom do the stories we hear at worship  
connect so powerfully to our current situation  
as today's Gospel, the Raising of Lazarus does.

In order to make certain you hear God's word for us  
in all its relevance and hopefulness

I want to set up the storytelling you are about to hear.

Over the years I have heard congregations claim a Bible story as their story.

That may be something we wish to do with the Raising of Lazarus.

Usually we keep some distance between us and the Gospel

Sometimes by treating it as holy or sacred, in other words, otherworldly.

To do so today would be to miss what Jesus has to say to us  
as individuals and as a faith community  
in our current dark, confining and dismal situation.

So, in order to assist you in your hearing,

I'd like to invite you to listen to this story through the lens of dying.

Your dying, PoP's dying, listen as if you are Mary, the disciples,  
especially Lazarus - all confined, feeling hopeless, see no way out.

Listen as if you are one of those who are living and dying in a worldwide pandemic.

Death is always at the door, but we mostly manage to ignore it,  
and pretend it won't come today or anytime soon.

In Covid-19, death has suddenly broken through our defenses;  
death could come next week.

Indeed, it is uncomfortably likely that it *will* have a shot at us.

So, how ought we, as disciples of Jesus, as baptized Christians,  
live in the face of death.

The story of the raising of Lazarus offers comfort, hope and promise  
as nothing else can, to our dire situation.

As you listen to the story engage with the word of Mary:

*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

Echo the words of the frustrated:

*Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man  
have kept this man from dying?*

Let your grieve, fear, and frustration  
wash over the story of Jesus and Lazarus.

Also, notice the reaction of Jesus –  
the pain, grief, the loss, the prayer, his words, his command

Listen to God's word for us today...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiaimPGwLy8>

Wow!

- Did you hear it?
- Were you able to make connections?
- What does the story make you think about?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does it speak to our lives, our world, our fears?

\*Now, it is no longer simply a bible story,

a holy word to be admired from afar;  
it is no longer a (really) long reading to get through;  
it is no longer a story we blow the dust off every 3 years.

Now, it is our story; now, it is about us;  
Now, it is us  
inside that dank, dark tomb: stinking of fear,  
wrapped in the bands of loneliness;  
blinded by the handkerchief of weary worry.

Now, we hope, we pray, we yearn, we listen for just a footstep,  
just a tear dropping on the ground,  
just a whisper of Jesus pacing before the stone,  
growling in his spirit in anger and frustration,  
before he cries out,  
in hope and joy and life, "come out!"

Now, we are not casual bystanders;  
Now, we are Lazarus  
waiting and listening. \*

Speak clearly and quickly, Lord, we pray.

\* adapted from now (John 11) Thom Shuman