

On this Side and the Next

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

November 2-3, 2024

John 11:32-44

³² 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.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ 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.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² 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.” ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ 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.”

Our Lord is Life! Here and now. Later, on the other side. Whether our pain is acute or smoldering in the background, Jesus reaches into our darkness and calls our name. When we hear our name, when we are known and loved back into life (whether that's due to grief or any other challenge), we realize we've been known by the resurrecting God. Jesus Christ our Lord.

On this All Saints Day, God's peace to you and me. May we hear Jesus calling our names. Amen.

Jesus wept. He cried. We can only speculate why our Lord cried. Perhaps it was because Lazarus was a good friend. Maybe Jesus saw in Lazarus' death, His own upcoming death and suffering. God only knows, literally, what was happening in Jesus' spirit at that moment. He was disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

We've all been at some point in our lives, disturbed, distressed, agitated, troubled, concerned, worried or even distraught. We know those feelings. They come upon us when something terrible has happened or we know is about to happen. God

gives us our emotions as protection, warning signs even. Jesus, fully God, apparently had strong emotions too. What a gift. What a gift that when we are grieving or distressed, we know that Jesus felt those same feelings.

There were those standing there that day, that knew Jesus was special – different. ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’ Maybe today, depending on the kind of death that we’ve experienced, maybe we’ve thought the same thing. ‘Why didn’t God save my loved one?’

In this world still wrought with sin, the daily progression of death tramps onward through foreign lands, vulnerable children, gang violence, deadly hunger, rampant disease. ‘Why God? Why?’

Grief can stop us with questions that have no answers this side of heaven. Why one person lives and another dies, is a mystery that we have to gently lay at God’s feet until the time we will know the answer. Those questions leave us mired and stuck in an ever-circling drain.

We have to take the next step, which Jesus did in this story. He went to the tomb, ordered it opened and He called Lazarus’ name. ‘Lazarus, come out!’

Just like on that Easter morning when Jesus called her name. ‘Mary!’

When our Lord calls our name, new life comes. New life arrives.

We all can remember our parents calling our names to get us out of bed. ‘Fred!’ ‘Pam, get up!’ We all rolled over and pulled the blanket over our heads. This is not that.

This is God, speaking into our darkness. God who created life in the beginning out of darkness and chaos. There was *tohu va vohu*. Darkness and chaos. Then God said, “Sun! Moon! Stars!” They appeared. God creates life by Godself and also through we and our actions.

The crumpled Kleenex lay all around the floor. He’d been crying for a long time. No one knew. He lived alone. He felt all alone. The pain was so acute he had hidden it from everyone.

Suddenly his phone rang. It was his good friend. He answered, covering up his emotions with a strong, “hello?” “Hey there! How are you?” “I’m fine.” “Really, you don’t sound fine. What’s going on?”

“Lazarus, come out!” “Mary, it’s me!” “What’s going on, you don’t sound fine?” God calls us out of darkness into His life. As Prof. Brian Peterson writes, “Jesus breaks into our present and transforms it. What we need to hear is that on both sides of the grave there is life for us because Jesus has been sent to call our names. On both sides of the grave Jesus is life for us.”ⁱ

Jesus is the Lord is Life! Here and now. Later, on the other side. Whether our pain is acute or smoldering in the background, Jesus reaches into our darkness and calls our name. When we hear our name, when we are known and loved back into life, we realize we’ve been known by the resurrecting God. Jesus Christ our Lord.

In a few moments we’ll hear the names of our loved ones and friends who have died in the last year. Names are so important. They embody not only the identification of an individual, but they capture the essence of a person.

Jesus called people’s names. He calls ours. And when the phone rings into the darkness of someone crying on their couch, you can trust that’s God calling. It’s what Jesus does! He brings life on this side of the grave and in the next.

Perhaps this is what All Saints Day is all about. Our loved ones now know peace. They know the fullness of God’s love and unending mercy. We too, know that one day we will reach that promised land. It’s we who are still on this side of heaven, who struggle with the loss. There is no place so tired, so confused, so dead or so lost, that Jesus cannot call your name and mine, to bring us back into the light...into life itself. Amen!

ⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/all-saints-day/commentary-on-john-1132-44-3>