

The Raising of Lazarus

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Hello, I'm Sarah Christmyer, inviting you to listen to the Lord this week as he invites you to life. We are going to take a fresh look at the gospel account of the raising of Lazarus, and then we are going to pray with one of my favorite Psalms, a Psalm 130. So thank you for joining me. Let's start in prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that you will make us faithful followers of the Spirit of your resurrection. Grant that we may be inwardly renewed, dying to ourselves, so that you may live in us and may our lives serve as signs of the transforming power of your love. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What Is Eternal Life Like?

I find myself thinking a lot about heaven lately, maybe because I know a number of people who have died recently and it's just a great comfort to me knowing that they're there. But also I find looking at heaven and just keeping my eyes on that eternal life as a great help and a comfort when times are rough. But I find myself asking myself as we approach Easter and celebration of the resurrection, did Jesus only come so that we could go to heaven? I think that's a fair question. What is eternal life after all? What is resurrection life?

I found this interesting thing in Pope Benedict the 16th in his wonderful book, "Jesus of Nazareth", the last volume "Holy Week". He says, "Eternal life is not just, I guess life after death in contrast to this present life." "Eternal life is life itself, real life, which can also be lived in the present age and is no longer challenged by physical death." "This is the point" he says, "to seize life here and now." "Real life that can no longer be destroyed by anything or anyone." Isn't that beautiful? I think that's challenging too. I don't normally think of eternal life in that way. And maybe that is why in the fifth week of Lent in year A, mother church turns our attention to this remarkable resurrection life that we have now, because we're waiting to celebrate it in a couple of weeks.

So first of all, in the Old Testament reading, the prophet Ezekiel speaks God's words to his people who are in exile, which of course in a spiritual sense is what all of us are like in exile from God. But God promises to open up their graves and bring them to new life, not just in the second coming, but He promises to bring them to new life in their land so present life.

And then in Romans 8, St. Paul speaks to us in the second reading. This is from Romans chapter 8. He talks about how we can live in the spirit even though our bodies are dead because of sin. And he says, "That the Holy Spirit gives us life not only to our spirits, which I

think we expect, but to our mortal bodies also." Interesting. And then in the gospel we have Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead to life, right out of the grave. It's a wonderful, wonderful account, which I'd like to turn our attention to now.

This is in John chapter 11, if you'd like to read the whole thing later. It opens up with the news that Lazarus, very good friend of Jesus is sick. And John says, now Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters who are Martha and Mary. So what he goes to see them? No. So he stays put. He stays there for a couple of days while Lazarus gets sicker and sicker and eventually he dies. But Jesus loved that family and he wants them to know not only his love, Jesus wants them to know the power and the glory of God. And so he waits.

Focusing on Lazarus

So I want to focus though on Lazarus more than on the family. We can leave that for another time maybe. But what was that like for Lazarus? You know, he's sick, he dies. That's the end for him, right? I don't think he sees that somebody closes his eyes for him, cleans him, anoints him with oil and spices. Then what they would do is they'd wrap, wrap his hands together with band bandages, wrap the feet together, put a shroud around his whole body, tucking in some aromatic herbs, spices maybe. And then finally they would bind his face with another bandage. So he's kind of cocooned in all of these bandages. And then he is laid reverently, I'm sure in the grave.

He doesn't know about any of that, does he? He's gone. He's dead. And he's not aware over the next few days that nature is taking its course, you know, starting to eat away at his flesh. He's not aware that Jesus finally does come, comes to his grave and weeps because he loved them, right? And I don't think that he hears the stone being dragged away. He doesn't hear Jesus and his sister outside talking. He doesn't see the light spilling in from outside. You know, even if he was alive, his face is bandaged up. He can't see. Maybe a little glimmer of light, but his eyes are closed, right? I don't think any of this. And I want to ask him about this someday if I am fortunate enough to speak to him. Because if you can imagine, somehow he does hear, Lazarus hears a voice, the voice of Jesus calling him, Lazarus, come out.

So put yourself in Lazarus's place. You know, his body's not in great shape. He's all wrapped up in these bandages like a cocoon, hands and feet tied together maybe, but suddenly he's alive again and he's supposed to move somehow. Even supposing that he loosens those bandages up enough so that he can move, where's he supposed to go? How's he supposed to get there? And I think of times when I've been in the dark and that the way you just strain as much as you can to hear or to see anything, one tiny light, one noise that will tell you where it is you're supposed to go, and your body somehow is able to move in that direction. I think that's what happened. Because he did have one thing. Lazarus had the voice of Jesus calling him, and he fixated on that. And maybe he could move his feet a little bit. He obeyed that voice. He took one step or made one movement and the Holy Spirit had to help him. How else did he get out there? Because when he gets out of the grave and comes out into the light, he's still completely wrapped up.

The Holy Spirit helped him. Lazarus come out, John wrote. The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go." I love to think about this because Lazarus is you and me. I know

he is me. And not just at the second coming, you know, Lazarus is, is me in life today when I am dead because of sin, whether it's original sin, or whether it's my own personal sin. You know the effect of sin, it pulls you away from God, it turns you away. It clouds your vision, it stops up your ears so that you can't see him. That's the effect that sin has on us. But then there are other things too.

Listen to the Voice of God

You know, Lazarus is us. Every time we are so weighed down by circumstances or trapped by things that have happened to us by illness, by debt, by an enemy of some sort, whatever it is, these are the effects of the sin in the world. Even if it's not our personal sin, we struggle with this all the time. And in a way it puts us in a grave. It weighs us down with burial claws. So much so that sometimes it's really hard to move. We are Lazarus. "And the Lord wants to open our graves and call us to rise from them or make us rise for them," as he says through Ezekiel. He wants to fill us with eternal life, with the roots of that now, not just wait until we die physically. So today, whoever you are listening to me, you know the place that you are in might feel like a grave.

I encourage you to listen for the voice of God. Listen for Jesus calling you. Strain toward whatever little light you can see. Maybe things are cloudy, maybe your ears feel stopped up. Take the little bit that you have and strain toward that. Ask for the Holy Spirit to help you free from those grave claws to move to the new life that he has for you to be living now today. Psalm 130 is the Psalm that gets paired with these readings in on the fifth Sunday of Lent this year. And it's the perfect psalm for us to be praying together.

Psalm 130

So I'm going to read that now and reflect on it a little bit, and then we will pray with it. And I hope that you'll carry that into your prayer during this week, maybe into Holy Week as we wait for Resurrection Day and Easter. All right, I'm going to read it once and then I'll reflect a little bit and then we'll read it together. Maybe turn to it in your Bible so you can read along. This is Psalm 130.

"Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my voice."

"Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

"If you O Lord should mark iniquities, Lord who could stand, but there's forgiveness with you that you may be feared."

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope."

"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchman for the morning, more than watchman for the morning."

"O, Israel, hope in the Lord."

"For with the Lord there is mercy and with him is plenteous redemption."

"And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

A Reflection on Psalm 130

It's beautiful, beautiful cry for help from a very deep, dark place. Let's look at it a little bit closer. Starts out those famous words. *"Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord." "Lord, hear my voice." "Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."* Notice that rather than just drown in his sorrows, the psalmist looks up, he reaches for the Lord full of trust in his mercy. Okay, unlike Lazarus who was completely dead, we are able to look up for the to the Lord and reach out for him. And then the psalmist waits, having put his hope in the Lord, hope in his word, he waits and he waits and he waits. Note the repetition when you're reflecting on this.

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope." "My soul waits for the Lord." I think waiting might be the hardest thing to do sometimes, at least it is for me. I want, I want to my answer now, right? But notice that the psalmist waiting is filled with trust, with hope, with assurance. Because he knows his God, he has hope in his word, and he's going to stand on that. He knows that God saves.

So he goes on, *"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchman for the morning, more than watchman for the morning."* When you see repetition in a Psalm like this, it's really trying to draw your attention. It's like bold face, what we would do today or underscore, or neon lights or something, pay attention. And I don't know that I would've paid attention if it wasn't repeated, but waiting more than watchmen for the morning is really a beautiful image. A watchman is a sentinel.

You know, any city would have watchmen standing on the walls, especially at night, walking around, keeping a lookout in case anybody came to attack. This particular watchman has the darkest part of the night. You know, maybe three, four or five in the morning, you're tired and it is really, really dark and there's nothing going on in this city. There's nothing anywhere. But he's not just looking for people who might attack, he is waiting for the morning, okay? His, he's straining against the darkness. Longing to see just that little glimmer of light when the sun starts coming over the horizon. That because why? That's going to mean the end of his shift. He's going to get to go home to bed and he's exhausted. But think of that kind of waiting. This is why hope is not just wishful thinking. That watchman knows without a doubt, mourning is coming. And in the same way, when we wait on the Lord, we know without a doubt that he is there, that he loves us, and that he is coming, all right?

So verse seven, *"O Israel hope in the Lord." "For with the Lord there is mercy." "And with him is plenteous redemption."* Mercy, that word mercy there it's hesed. Steadfast love it might say in some other translations. Hesed, mercy, it's the steadfast love, the faithful, completely trustworthy love that the father has for his children, for his people. It's a love that goes above and beyond what's required even to death, right? That's the love that our father has for us. And so know that anything that happens, God allows to happen.

It happens within his divine and loving providence within the scope of his merciful love. Jesus waiting while Lazarus dies and is buried is just one example. You know, think of what that might have looked like from Martha's side. Why isn't he coming? He's our good friend. He has something much greater in mind for them, that they will see his glory and really know who he is. God has something in mind like that for us, when he has us wait, allows us to wait

both to draw out our yearning toward him and also perhaps to show us something greater in his time. So are you in a dark place now maybe? Call out to God as the psalmist does, and like Lazarus, crane your ears, strain your eyes. Like that watchman watch and wait so that you're ready when he calls. Hope in his word, read his word, know his word, trust in his love, because he does see you. He hears you. He knows when you're ill. He knows when you're dying. He knows when you're in trouble. And he weeps with you like he wept with Martha and Mary. Okay? And if he delays again, it's some something greater can be done. Trust him. He knows the glories in the new life that are in store.

Closing Prayer

Let's one more time, just prayerfully read Psalm 130 and allow it to speak within our hearts. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Lord, open our hearts to hear your word and listen to our cry.

"Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord."

"Lord, hear my voice."

"Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

"If you O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord who could stand?"

"But there's forgiveness with you that you may be feared."

"I wait for the Lord."

"My soul waits."

"And in his word, I hope."

"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchman for the morning, more than watchman for the morning."

"O, Israel, hope in the Lord." "For with the Lord there is mercy."

"And with him is plenteous redemption."

"And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

And of course, we can put our names there in place of Israel. What speaks to you in this Psalm? What do you hear? Allow that to resonate in you and take a minute to respond to the Lord. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

I hope that you will take this into next week or into Holy Week and just maybe reflect a bit on John 11 and this wonderful gospel account of the raising of Lazarus. But definitely take Psalm 130 with you, pray with it, learn it, reflect it. Take it before the blessed sacrament in your prayer and practice yearning for and waiting for our God. And I pray that you will rejoice come Easter in the light of his resurrection. May God richly bless you.