

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
March 29, 2020  
Lent 5

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, today's gospel reading about the raising of Lazarus...

Today's gospel reading about the amazing miracle of Lazarus being restored to life...

Today's gospel reading is wondrous to behold.

PAUSE

And for all the things Jesus says in that gospel reading...

For all the one-liners from Jesus that emerge from this reading...

"Your brother will rise again."

"I am the resurrection and the life."

"Unbind him, and let him go."

For all the one-liners in this passage, there is one line in particular that captured my attention.

There was one sentence that made me stop in my tracks.

One sentence that I could not shake.

PAUSE

Jesus tells his disciples that their friend Lazarus has fallen asleep.

And the disciples are confused, thinking that Lazarus would be okay if he is only asleep.

But then Jesus tells the disciples plainly, "Lazarus is dead. Let us go to him."

"Let us go to him."

PAUSE

And wham! It hit me like a ton of bricks.

Jesus and his disciples are able to gather.

They are able to go to Lazarus.

They are able to be in close proximity to each other.

Those words stuck out for me.

Those words stuck out because in our coronavirus reality, we are not able to freely do this.

We can't just go and gather with others.

In our coronavirus reality, we can't just go and gather, but instead we need to stay at home and limit our travel.

In our coronavirus reality, we need to practice social distancing, or at least our physical distancing, as it is now being called.

In our coronavirus reality, we can't just up and go.

And these words stuck out for me.

They stuck out because Jesus and his disciples were able to go to Lazarus.

Jesus was able to go and be with Mary and Martha to console them.

Jesus is able to go and give comfort to them.

PAUSE

We have no doubt heard on the news that funerals are being postponed because of the coronavirus.

Even with the passing of a loved one, family and friends can't even as much as gather in worship, to seek the comfort of God in community, because of this coronavirus reality.

But Jesus and his disciples in our story go and gather.

So, yes, this one line caught my attention today in this story because in that verse, that one line, I am reminded of the power there is in gathering with other people without the worry that we are putting others or ourselves at risk.

And, I must say, that over these past weeks, that is one of things I have really missed... is being able to gather with all of you in person face to face.

I have missed our gatherings.

So, yes, this one line just popped out from the reading to me.

PAUSE

And, then I read a little further, and I noticed something that I had never seen before in the story.

I noticed that Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

And, I thought, "What is brother Thomas talking about here?"

What does our fellow brother in Christ mean by saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with him"?"

And, then it dawned on me.

Jesus had just said, "Let us go to him."

That is, Jesus had said, "Let us go to him."

Let us go TO HIM.

Maybe we are still missing it.

Jesus says, Let us go TO HIM, HIM WHO IS DEAD, HIM WHO IS NOT ALIVE...HIM WHO IS LAZARUS.

Are we still not getting it?

Are we still not seeing what the gospel is saying?

Well, if not, let me break it down for us.

Jesus says...to his disciples, "Let us...go to...him, Lazarus, who is dead."

You see, why would someone say to another person or persons...as Jesus does to his disciples...

Why would someone say to another person, "Let us go to the dead person"?"

For what purpose? For what reason would you go to the person who is now dead?

No, you would go family, and to friends, and to loved ones.

Several years back, when my grandmother died, and I was still in seminary in Gettysburg at the time, and my parents were at their home in the suburbs of Philly.

When my grandmother died, my parents didn't say, "Your grandmother has died. Come to her."

No, my parents said to me, "Your grandmother just died. Can you come back home? Can you come be with us?"

PAUSE

So, it is strange for Jesus to say to his disciples, "Lazarus is dead. Let us go to HIM."

And these words of Jesus were so befuddling to Thomas that he then says to the other disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Thomas thinks that Jesus is literally going to be with Lazarus in death.

This is what Thomas thinks, or so it would seem.

Thomas says, "Let us go also, that we may die with him."

Thomas thinks the disciples should go and die with Jesus, because Jesus is going to Lazarus.

That's commitment, right?

That's commitment that the disciples are agreed to follow Jesus even unto death.

Of course, it is also ironic, because when Jesus is facing arrest and subsequent death on the cross, all the disciples scatter and abandon Jesus.

But sisters and brothers in Christ, we aren't there yet in our Lenten journey with Jesus.

We aren't yet there.

We are still here in this story about the raising of Lazarus, which is a foreshadowing of Jesus' own resurrection to come.

PAUSE

"Let us go to him," Jesus says.

"Let us go to Lazarus."

And no, contrary to the thoughts of Thomas and the other disciples, Jesus is not going to meet Lazarus by dying so as to be with him in Sheol, that shadowy underworld of ancient times.

No, Jesus is not dying here in this passage.

Soon enough Jesus will suffer crucifixion and be buried, and as Scriptures say he will descend to the spirits in prison who have not heard the gospel.

But we are not there yet. We are not there yet.

No, Jesus instead is going to meet Lazarus at the tomb.

And Jesus will raise him up.

And many will come to believe.

And, on the heels of this story in this gospel of John, we learn that this event the raising of Lazarus is the impetus for Jesus' own death.

The chief priests and the Pharisees will have a meeting after the raising of Lazarus. And the chief priests and the Pharisees, at the conclusion of that meeting, decide Jesus fate, for Scripture says, "From that day on they planned to put him to death."

And so a lot happens, a lot happens in John' story here simply because Jesus says, "Let us go to him. Let us go to Lazarus."

Indeed, the gospel happens—the suffering, death, and resurrection happens, because Jesus and his disciples go.

The story of God's grace for all people happens because Jesus and his disciples go.

And this...this is the recurring theme throughout the Bible.

People go, and the story of God's grace for God's people unfolds as a result.

After eating from the forbidden tree, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, God told Adam and Eve, "Go from the Garden of Eden." And Adam and Eve went.

And after the Flood has subsided, God told Noah and his family, "Go out from the ark. Noah, you and your wife, and your family, go." And Noah and his family went.

And God, our God who is God of all the families of the earth, God told Abraham and his family specifically, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. Go." And Abraham went.

And when God's people were enslaved in Egypt, God raised up a deliverer. God called out to Moses, and God said to Moses, "Go to the Pharaoh in Egypt, go and tell him to release my people from Egypt, and then go from this land."  
And Moses went.

Yes throughout Scripture, God has told his people to go, to go, to go again, and the story of God's grace unfolds.

And Jesus, Jesus keeps with that tradition.

When he is raised from the dead and when his disciples meet him on the mountain, Jesus tells the disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nations. Go and baptize. Go and teach everything that I have commanded you."

But even before we get to the resurrection, Jesus is already telling his disciples here in our gospel reading today that they are to go, they are to go to Lazarus.

"Let us go to him, him who is dead, him who is not alive, him who is Lazarus."

The disciples don't understand why. They think they are going there to die.

But to the contrary, the disciple and Jesus are going there to bring life. They are going there to raise up Lazarus.

And from that, the story of Jesus' own death and resurrection will be set in motion...all because Jesus and the disciples go.

PAUSE

Yes, it is true, sisters and brothers in Christ, the Bible confirms it, we as God's are a people on-the-go.

God tells God's people to go... and we go.

Except, except, when we are told by the governor or the President or by some other person in authority, that we can't go.

That we have to say at home and limit our travel.

That we have to practice social distancing.

And so then, what are we to do?

What are we to do, we who are called by God to be a people on-the-go...what are we supposed to do—how do we go?

Well, to that, I say the Devil won't stop us.

To that, I say the coronavirus won't impede our forward progress.

No, the powers that stand against us will not stop us.

No, even in the face of adversity we will still go.

We will go to our computer to send emails, or we will go to our desks to send cards to our family and friends to tell them we love them.

We will go to our phone and we will call our brothers and sisters in Christ, to assure them that we care about them and are thinking of them.

We will go to a quiet place and we will offer our prayers to God seeking God's healing for our hurting world.

We will go to the Scriptures and will remind ourselves of God's abiding love and mercy.

We will go...it may not be a long journey physically, maybe no further then across our room to our phone, our computer, or our Bible...

But we will still go, and in our going the powerful story of God continues to unfold in the lives and in the hearts of God's people.

Yes, we will still go even now. We are a people on-the-go.

We are a people whom God is sending. Thanks be to God. Amen.