

“Proceeding Into The World”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
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Luke 10:38-42

John 11:1-57

‘She said to him,

“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,  
[the one] who is coming into the world.”

John 11:27

Let us pray...O God,

Give us hope to live lives that defy the fear of death and free us from

all that would bind us and keep us from seeing the beautiful gift that life is.

Amen

Our Gospel lessons the past two weeks have been lengthy readings

which have given us portraits of people whose lives were changed by Jesus,  
including the Samaritan woman at the well and the man born blind.

Today’s lesson about the resurrection of Lazarus

tells us very little about who Lazarus himself was –

except that he was beloved by Jesus and his disciples.

In this story, we learn more about his sisters, Martha and Mary of Bethany,  
and Jesus, too.

In the first Gospel lesson from Luke – which Lou Cummings shared with us,

we see the contrast in Martha and Mary’s personalities –

which also serves to demonstrate two styles of spirituality.

Mary is contemplative as she sits at Jesus’ feet, and is *attentive* to his teachings;

While, Martha is more of an activist as she organizes and *attends* to  
the practical matters of hospitality.

Both are legitimate styles of spiritual service

with Jesus seeming to favor Mary’s devotion, but he’s really saying that  
taking the time to listen is important work, too.

However, the faith of both women is put to the test in the lesson from John 11,  
with the death of their brother, Lazarus...

Death... Not a pleasant topic, but it is woven into the fabric of Lent  
and Easter.

Many of us would rather go from Jesus’ triumphal entry on Palm Sunday  
to the Resurrection on Easter Sunday – and bypass the messy details  
of Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion, and death.

Death is not something we like to talk about, but the fear of death  
is one of our greatest enemies in life.

I’m not sure who said it first – whether it was

my friend Garrett Wilson or Woody Allen, but as the saying goes,

‘I’m not afraid of dying. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.’

Willard, p.2

There is a lot in this passage that can teach us about how to cope with the way we think about death – whether you accept someone can be raised back to life after four days, or not.

First, Jesus speaks of death as a form of ‘sleep’ – though the disciples don’t get it and think he is only talking about sleep.

Jesus’ description of death as sleep is still a mystery, but hopeful for the vision of awakening from death...

Having heard the news that Lazarus was very ill – nevertheless, Jesus lingers; Yet we understand that Jesus was going to teach his disciples about resurrection from death and what he was going to go through.

Since the death of John the Baptist, Jesus had been preparing his disciples and himself for his destiny to confront the worldly powers in Jerusalem.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he tells the disciples that the Son of Man must suffer and die, but on the third day rise.

What this suggests is that Jesus’ knowledge of himself is that he was born to die – that he was meant to be a sacrifice.

This is basically what the high priest Caiaphas said, such that ‘one [person] should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.’”

This also confirms what theologian Rene Girard has said to explain why the Jesus Christ was treated with contempt and violence:

It is not God who requires sacrifice, but rather what humankind too often does to maintain a facade of justice.

Therefore, it would take the innocent Son of God to expose the vicious cycle of blame and retribution for us to finally recognize and stop doing it ourselves.

Can you imagine what it was like for Jesus – knowing he would die a violent death for the provocation he intended to do?

Jesus was grimly determined to follow through on his purpose – even to demonstrate resurrection at the expense of a friend dying.

From the Gospel of John’s text, it would appear that Martha and Mary were not very happy with Jesus.

They appealed to him for help in full confidence that he could have done something. Instead, he showed up four days later.

Now, what if it was a journey of several hours for a messenger to go from Bethany to where Jesus was and make the trip back the same day.

Jesus didn’t go along with the messenger, but waited two days, before making the trip himself.

If Lazarus had died that first day and was buried before evening, he would have been in the tomb four days.

Willard, p.3

Martha and Mary would have been distressed that – not only hadn't Jesus arrived in time that day to save their brother,  
but he didn't even show up until three days after that.

When he finally did arrive at Bethany, Martha –  
true to the image we already have of her as someone who was very direct,  
left the house where she and Mary were grieving with family & friends.  
Martha was upset, but it seems that Mary was so angry,  
she wouldn't leave the house...

In no uncertain terms, Martha says,

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”

Jesus response to her is no-nonsense, too.

He is determined to teach everyone present that he is part  
of the very dynamics of life & death –  
the blessing and glory of God as the one who raises human beings  
into eternal life.

I imagine Martha's response to Jesus in this way:

“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah –

The One who descended from God, the One Who Is proceeding into the world!”

That is a beautiful image to me – Jesus ‘proceeding into the world’...

Martha immediately goes back home, but she has intuitively picked up on something  
despite Jesus' stone cold determination.

She tells her sister

“The teacher is here and he's calling for you' – “He needs you”...

Without a word, Mary gets up and goes to him –  
and all their family & friends follow her.

When she gets there and sees him, Mary doesn't say anything at first –  
She's a strong woman like her sister and maybe she was still mad,  
but it doesn't last as she kneels before him and  
says the same thing Martha said,

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”

This had an effect on Jesus – the defensive exterior begins to crack  
and the protective ice melts, and his heart is broken,  
because these are people he loved.

Jesus became human in the way that we are.

He asks, “Where did you lay him down?” and when they show him the way,  
Jesus cries...

Willard, p.4

When I do funerals, I use this litany...

*We gather here in the protective shelter of God's healing love.*

*You are free to go through whatever emotions you have to go through –  
grief, anger, emptiness, even joy for a life well-lived are appropriate.*

*Know that God loves and cares for all creatures that God has created.*

*Jesus said that God knows each of us –*

*even the hairs of your head have been counted*

*and not even a little bird falls to Earth*

*without God's knowledge and care.*

*We gather here as God's people, to remember loved ones who have died*

*and to reflect on the brief and beautiful gift that life is,*

*as well to comfort one another in our common loss.*

*We gather to hear God's word of hope that can drive away despair*

*and move us to offer God our praise.*

*We gather to give God thanks for the life of our loved one*

*as we celebrate the good news of Christ's resurrection –*

*that there is more to this life than we know.*

*For whether we live or whether we die,*

*we belong to Christ who is Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

Like Martha, each of us can still say,

"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah –

The One who descended from God, the One Who Is proceeding into the world!"

What is proceeding? A new way to understand death – and eternal life  
that is defiant of death.

What Jesus received from us was empathy in the midst of his divine mission –

his heart was broken so he could *see why* what he was doing was so important;

and his courage did not fail him when he finally confronted

the powers and principalities of the world.

What Jesus gave us was a renewed sense of wonder

like what the first people felt discovering the beauty of the natural world.

Think of it... resurrection from death, healing, forgiveness, joy

that there is more to this life than we know.

Whatever cripples someone, whatever binds someone,

whatever keeps someone trapped in body, mind, or spirit,

such things are no match for Jesus Christ who still says as if to each of us,

"Lazarus, come out!"

and Jesus still challenges each of us to help one another, saying,

"Unbind [them] and let [them] go!"

Amen

*Frederick Buechner is an author and Presbyterian minister,  
and in his book From The Hungering Dark, he wrote:  
One life on this earth is all that we get, whether it is enough or not enough, and  
the obvious conclusion would seem to be that at the very least we are fools  
if we do not live it as fully and bravely and beautifully as we can.*

*Our first lesson today is from the Gospel of Luke 10:38-42  
in which we meet the sisters Martha and Mary  
who have very different, but important priorities...*

[38] While Jesus and his disciples were traveling,  
Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha  
welcomed him as a guest.

[39] She had a sister named Mary,  
who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message.

[40] By contrast, Martha was preoccupied  
with getting everything ready for their meal.

So Martha came to him and said,

“Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me  
to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me.”

[41] The Lord answered,

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.

[42] One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part.  
It won't be taken away from her.”

*Let us be guided and challenged by these words.*

John 11 [RSV]

[1] Now a certain man was ill, Laz'arus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

[2] It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Laz'arus was ill.

[3] So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

[4] 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."

[5] Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Laz'arus.

[6] So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

[7] Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again."

[8] The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?"

[9] 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.

[10] But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

[11] 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."

[12] The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."

[13] Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.

[14] Then Jesus told them plainly, "Laz'arus is dead;

[15] and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

[16] Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

[17] Now when Jesus came, he found that Laz'arus had already been in the tomb four days.

[18] Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off,

[19] and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.

[20] When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house.

[21] Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

[22] And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

[23] Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

[24] Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

[25] Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

[26] and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

[27] She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

[28] When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

[29] And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.

[30] Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

[31] 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.

[32] 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."

[33] When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled;

[34] and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."

[35] Jesus wept.

[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, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

[39] 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."

[40] Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

[41] So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

[42] 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."

[43] When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Laz'arus, come out."

[44] 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."

[45] Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him;

[46] but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

[47] So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.

[48] If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

[49] But one of them, Ca'iaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all;

[50] you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."

[51] He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation,

[52] and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

[53] So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death.

[54] Jesus therefore no longer went about openly among the Jews, but went from there to the country near the wilderness, to a town called E'phraim; and there he stayed with

the disciples.

[55] Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves.

[56] They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?"

[57] Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if any one knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Inspired by John 11:1-57

THEN, A CERTAIN PERSON WAS STRICKEN ILL.

IT WAS LAZARUS OF BETHANY, THE VILLAGE OF MARY  
AND HER SISTER, MARTHA.

INDEED, IT WAS THIS SAME MARY,

WHO HAD ANOINTED THE LORD WITH OIL,  
AND DRIED HIS FEET WITH HER HAIR –  
WHOSE BROTHER WAS LAZARUS!

SO, MARY SENT A MESSAGE TO JESUS SAYING,

“LORD, ONE WHO IS YOUR BELOVED FRIEND  
IS DEATHLY SICK.”

BUT AFTER HEARING THIS, JESUS SAID,

“THIS SICKNESS WILL NOT LEAD TO DEATH,  
BUT IT IS FOR THE SAKE OF GOD’S BLESSING  
THAT THE SON OF GOD WILL BE  
BLESSED THROUGH HIM.

[SO,] EVEN THOUGH HE KNEW THIS WAS AN EMERGENCY,  
JESUS STAYED WHERE HE WAS FOR TWO DAYS.

AFTERWARDS, HE SAID TO THE DISCIPLES,

“LET’S GO BACK TO JUDEA.”

THE DISCIPLES SAID TO HIM,

“RABBI, LATELY THE JUDEANS HAVE BEEN  
OUT TO STONE YOU!

AND YOU WANT TO GO BACK THERE AGAIN?”

JESUS ANSWERED,

“ARE THERE NOT TWELVE HOURS OF DAYLIGHT  
WHEN ANYONE CAN GO ABOUT  
THROUGH THE DAY

WITHOUT BUMPING INTO SOMETHING

BECAUSE THEY SEE BY THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD?

“BUT WHEN SOMEONE GOES ABOUT AT NIGHT,  
THEY BUMP INTO THINGS  
IF THEY HAVE NO LIGHT WITH THEM...  
LAZARUS, OUR DEAR FRIEND, HAS FALLEN ASLEEP  
SO I AM GOING TO AWAKEN HIM.”

THEN THE DISCIPLES SAID,  
“LORD, IF HE HAS ONLY FALLEN ASLEEP,  
HE WILL BE ALRIGHT.”

BUT JESUS WAS TALKING ABOUT THE DEATH OF LAZARUS;  
SO AS TO ENLIGHTEN THEM ABOUT  
THIS ‘FALLING TO SLEEP’,  
HE SPOKE ABOUT SLEEP,  
BUT NOW HE TOLD THEM BLUNTLY,  
“LAZARUS IS DEAD!  
AND I HOPE YOU WILL COME TO BELIEVE  
BECAUSE WE WERE NOT THERE.  
BUT NO MATTER WHAT,  
I AM GOING TO HIM!”

THEN, THOMAS, THE ONE CALLED ‘THE TWIN’,  
SAID TO HIS FELLOW DISCIPLES,  
“LET’S ALSO GO AND DIE WITH HIM!”

JESUS CAME TO FIND THAT LAZARUS WAS ALREADY  
IN THE TOMB FOR FOUR DAYS.  
NOW, BETHANY IS NEAR JERUSALEM,  
ABOUT TWO MILES AWAY;  
SO, MANY JUDEANS HAD COME IN ORDER TO  
CONSOLE MARTHA AND MARY  
ABOUT THEIR BROTHER.  
AND AFTER HEARING THAT JESUS HAD ARRIVED,  
MARTHA WENT OUT TO MEET HIM –  
BUT MARY STAYED HOME.

MEANWHILE, MARTHA CONFRONTED JESUS, SAYING,  
“LORD, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE  
MY BROTHER WOULD NOT HAVE DIED –  
BECAUSE I KNOW THAT WHATEVER  
WOULD HAVE BEEN ASKED OF GOD,  
GOD WOULD HAVE GIVEN YOU!”

JESUS SAID TO HER,

“I WILL RAISE UP YOUR BROTHER!”

MARTHA SAID TO HIM,

“I KNOW THAT THERE WILL BE A ‘RAISING UP’  
IN THE RESURRECTION AT THE END OF TIME...”

JESUS SAID TO HER,

“I AM THE ONE WHO RAISES UP  
AND THE ONE WHO GIVES LIFE.  
THOSE WHO TRUST ME WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED  
AND THOSE WHO LIVE TRUSTING IN ME  
WILL NOT DIE IN THE TIME TO COME.  
DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?”

SHE SAID TO HIM,

“YES, LORD, I BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE THE MESSIAH,  
THE ONE WHO DESCENDED FROM GOD,  
THE ONE WHO IS PROCEEDING INTO THE WORLD!”

AND HAVING SAID THIS, SHE DEPARTED AND  
SPOKE PRIVATELY WITH HER SISTER, MARY, SAYING,  
“THE RABBI, THE TEACHER, IS HERE  
AND...HE NEEDS YOU!”

UPON HEARING THIS,

SHE GOT UP QUICKLY AND WENT OUT TO HIM.

WHEN THE JUDEANS,

WHO WERE GRIEVING WITH MARY IN THE HOUSE,  
SAW HER GET UP QUICKLY AND GO OUT,  
THEY SUPPOSED THAT SHE WAS GOING TO THE TOMB  
TO MOURN THERE – SO THEY FOLLOWED ...

NOW, JESUS HAD NOT YET ENTERED THE VILLAGE,  
BUT WAS STILL ON THE HILL WHERE  
MARTHA HAD MET HIM.

WHEN MARY CAME TO THE PLACE WHERE JESUS WAS,  
SHE LOOKED AT HIM ...

AND KNELT DOWN BEFORE HIM, SAYING,

“LORD, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE  
MY BROTHER WOULD NOT HAVE DIED.”

WHEN JESUS SAW HER CRYING AND THOSE JUDEANS  
WHO HAD COME WITH HER ALSO CRYING,  
HE WAS OVERWHELMED IN THE SPIRIT –  
HE, HIMSELF, WAS DEEPLY MOVED!

AND HE SAID,  
“WHERE DID YOU LAY HIM DOWN?”  
THEY SAID TO HIM,  
“LORD, COME AND SEE. FOR YOURSELF.”  
JESUS BURST INTO TEARS.

THEN, THE JUDEANS SAID,  
“DO YOU SEE HOW HE LOVED HIM?”  
STILL SOMEONE SAID,  
“COULD NOT THIS FELLOW,  
WHO OPENED THE EYES OF BLIND PEOPLE,  
THEREFORE BE ABLE  
TO RAISE UP THIS PERSON, TOO?”

AS HE APPROACHED THE TOMB,  
AGAIN JESUS WAS OVERWHELMED WITH EMOTION.  
NOW, THE TOMB WAS COVERED WITH A ROCK UPON IT,  
[AND] JESUS SAID,  
“SOMEONE LIFT UP THE ROCK.”  
BUT MARTHA, THE SISTER OF THE ONE WHO HAD DIED, SAID,  
“LORD, THERE WILL BE CORRUPTION,  
BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN FOUR DAYS!”  
JESUS SAID TO HER,  
“DIDN'T I SAY TO YOU THAT YOU WOULD SEE  
GOD'S BLESSING IF YOU TRUST ME?”  
SO, THE ROCK WAS LIFTED UP.

AND JESUS LIFTED UP HIS EYES TO HEAVEN AND SAID,  
“I THANK THEE ABBA, FATHER,  
FOR LISTENING TO ME.  
NOW, I KNOW THAT THOU HEAR ME ALWAYS!  
BUT SPEAK THROUGH  
THIS CROWD STANDING ABOUT  
SO THAT THEY WILL KNOW  
THAT THOU SENT ME!”

HAVING SAID THIS, JESUS CRIED OUT IN A LOUD VOICE,  
“LAZARUS! COME OUT!”

[AND] THE ONE WHO HAD DIED CAME OUT,  
HIS HANDS AND FEET STILL TIED,  
HIS FACE WRAPPED IN A COVERING.  
JESUS SAID TO THEM,  
“UNBIND HIM AND LET HIM GO!”

SO, ALL THE JUDEANS WHO CAME WITH MARY  
AND SAW WHAT HAPPENED, BELIEVED IN HIM.  
STILL SOME WENT TO TELL THE PHARISEES –  
WHO GATHERED AT THE COUNCIL AND TALKED...  
“HOW IS IT THAT THIS ‘FELLOW’ IS  
DOING ALL THESE WONDER-WORKS?”  
IF WE PERMIT THIS TO GO ON,  
EVERYONE WILL CERTAINLY...  
BELIEVE IN HIM!”  
“AND THE ROMANS WILL BE UNLEASHED AGAINST US  
AND SWEEP US AWAY FROM OUR OWN LAND  
AS WELL AS OUR WAY OF LIFE!”

BUT ONE WHO WAS PROMINENT AMONG THEM – CAIAPHAS,  
WHO WAS HIGH-PRIEST THAT YEAR, SAID TO THEM,  
“YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS AT ALL!  
YOU HAVE NOT REASONED AS TO HOW IT  
FITS TOGETHER FOR YOUR OWN PURPOSE:  
THAT ONE PERSON DIE  
FOR THE SAKE OF THE PEOPLE  
SO THAT THE WHOLE NATION  
WILL NOT BE DESTROYED.”

NOW, HE DID NOT IMPART THIS AS HIS OWN OPINION,  
BUT AS ‘HIGH-PRIEST OF THE YEAR’ HE PROPHESED  
THAT THIS WOULD CERTAINLY TAKE PLACE:  
“JESUS WILL DIE FOR THE NATION,  
YET NOT FOR THE NATION ALONE,  
BUT SO THAT ALL THE SCATTERED CHILDREN OF GOD  
WILL BE GATHERED TOGETHER IN UNITY!”

[SO,] FROM THEN ON, THEY DELIBERATED  
AS TO HOW TO PUT JESUS TO DEATH.

SO, JESUS NO LONGER WENT ABOUT PUBLICLY  
AMONG THE JUDEANS,  
BUT JOURNEYED FROM THERE  
INTO THE REGION NEAR THE DESERT,  
SPEAKING IN THE CITIES OF EPHRAIM.  
HE STAYED THERE WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

BUT IT WAS GETTING CLOSER TO THE JEWISH PASSOVER,  
AND MANY PEOPLE WERE GOING UP TO JERUSALEM  
FROM THE SURROUNDING REGION  
TO SPIRITUALLY PREPARE THEMSELVES.

[AND] THOSE AT THE TEMPLE WERE ANXIOUS ABOUT JESUS  
AND ASKED WITH MUTUAL CONCERN,  
“DON’T YOU THINK ‘HE’  
WILL COME TO THE FESTIVAL?”

BUT THE HIGH-PRIESTS AND PHARISEES  
INSTRUCTED THEM ABOUT THE PURPOSE, PLACE,  
AND PREPARATIONS FOR SEIZING JESUS...