

Today, we remember those people whom we loved and knew ... that have died. Does the Gospel reading about Lazarus offer us any lessons for life?

I think it does. To those people in the crowd who witnessed Lazarus resurrection Jesus commands (points them into action): “**Unbind him, and let him go!**”

“Unbind him, and let him go!” is an invitation to be drawn into God’s life-giving work, to participate in, extend, and in some sense complete the reach of God’s mighty acts. It is a promise that resurrection is not simply a matter of “then” – whenever that might be but is also and equally a matter of “now.”

- Now there is something to do.
- Now we find courage to live amid fear.
- Now we sense God’s promise of life helping us not only live in the shadow of death with confidence but also resist the power of death that we concede too, perhaps, too quickly.

God’s promise of resurrection isn’t an invitation to deny death – the death rate in Pasadena is the same as every community: one per person and 100%.

God’s promise of resurrection does grant us both the permission and power to *defy* it: to defy death’s ability to overshadow and distort our lives, is:

- to deny death’s threat that there is nothing else,
- to deny those who believe because they have the ability to inflict death they are the most powerful people on earth.

This story, and the Easter story it prefigures, promises that death does not have the last word, and therefore that we are free to live now,

- to struggle now,
- to sacrifice now,
- to encourage others never to give up now,
- to live out of love rather than hate now, and
- to have their actions directed by hope rather than fear...now!

Considering God’s resurrection promise, death no longer terrifies us, not the death of the loved ones we remember on this day, nor our own.



Because of God's resurrection promise, the life we share in this world here and now no longer terrifies us either. The massacre of innocents, the politics of fear and division, the rhetoric of hate – these are heart wrenching elements of our life in the world, but they do not have the last word either and are not the final reality.

Prompted by God's promise of resurrection we can stand against them, hold onto each other amid them, and offer a testimony rooted in life and *love that runs to contrary* to the testimony of the world.

We give thanks for those saints who have gone before us – those we remember, grieve, and celebrate their place now in the nearer presence of God – after giving thanks for those saints who have gone before.

What about you? You are saints ... living the Now of life; the *now* of creation.

You have heard the word of resurrection and now are called to unbind all those bound by the fear of death and let go those struggling to find hope.

God who raised Jesus from the dead still needs us, wants us, invites us to participate in, extend, and even complete God's resurrection work by caring for, standing with, and lending our courage to those who are suffering and grieving, those who are most vulnerable and in need.

Saints, we have work to do, a call to answer, a resurrection life to lead here and now. "Unbind him, and let him go!" Jesus said, Be unbound today ... it is both our mandate and marching order,

for the God who answered Jesus' prayer in bringing Lazarus forth from the tomb, the God who raised Jesus from death, the God who promises us life eternal... *this God is not finished yet!* And we are the instruments of God's resurrection life, grace, and power here and now.

From the story of the temptation of Jesus, after forty days and forty nights of fasting:

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

In 1520, Martin Luther wrote in the treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian:"



“The soul can live without all things except the Word of God; without the Word of God nothing can help us. But when we have the Word we need nothing else, for in the Word we have enough food, joy, peace, light, art, justice, truth, wisdom, and all good things in abundance.”

We read the words, we believe the truth ... and then all hell breaks loose.

A rifle is carried into worship and bullets kill, wound, maim and tear up the soft, spiritual dynamic of worship, life is destroyed as we know it.

What is a believer to do?

Then we remember the truth: Life is both/and: Body and soul; heaven and hell; war and peace; flesh and spirit; good and evil.

We live with the freedom that every child of God has been given. The freedom to choose. The freedom of will. The freedom to forgive. Wow. There will always be a tension.

Oh, the pain of it all. The pain and suffering of life and death.

What do we make of pain and suffering?

“Every human being experiences pain at least once in his or her lifetime, and along with that pain comes a suffering unique to each person. **Pain occurs in the body** – we describe it by its intensity – and we experience it through physical, emotional, familial and spiritual symptoms.

Suffering, on the other hand, **takes place in the soul**, a place so intimate that no words can help us express how it actually feels. Suffering is truly a mystery. This mystery is not a problem to be solved, rather it is a journey we share with God, ourselves and, if we are able, with others.

Our understanding of how we have suffered gives us the ability to soften the impact it may have.” [Demaria, et al; A Meditation on suffering; Health Progress, Nov/Dec 2014]

In our pain and suffering,

We like soft ... but, then there it is: **hard**. HARD. Our faith journey grapples, struggles, and we wait for the lightening to strike. Our mysterious journey with God at our side is full of surprises.



Then, we open our eyes, our hearts, our blessings, and we discover that once again God brings us through ... in life and death.

What is a believer to do?

I think the best we can do is realize that the embers of the flame of eternal life are broadcast from us (who acknowledge the Word of God) for others to see. That ember of flame is even in the ashes of evil. Our personal challenge is to let the world know that we stand united in our faith; that we live in a world of darkness that is in severe need of the message of hope. We are called to fan the flames of the light of Christ that is smoldering in this wicked world.

We are challenged to stand united as one people of faith who profess a loving God who wants us to live co-operatively in a diverse society, proclaiming the truth of salvation. God so loved this world, that – in love – He gave his son. Now, that's the strength and power of love.

I believe the light of Christ is shining, even if it is only a small ember of ash ... in your life and in mine. Fan the flame with the love of God. His breath will give you strength and courage as you continue your journey.

Do not fear violence ... be loving. For: Love is greater than hate. AMEN.

God, your word is our great heritage, and shall be ours forever. Through life it guides our way, in death it is our stay. Lord, grant while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure throughout all generations. AMEN



