

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
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040217

(I will bet you were wondering if this was a Walking Dead episode with the Gospel. No, it is the story of Jesus)

God is in the business, we, as Christians, are in the business of restoration, healing, helping life to emerge out of death, the business of eternal life, God's glory. We partner with God to help breathe life into the dead bones, into the areas of the world where there is no life, no air, no love. As Christians, we become God's voice, His hands and feet, His heart, His will, His hope that is for everyone in the world. And this becomes our everything, our mission.

Where are you on your walk with the Lord? Where are you in life, in your work, with your family and friends, in your life outside of work and family? Where are you with politics, for goodness sake? Are you happy, sad, or anxious? Are you lonely? Or is everything just fine, but you are not filled with direction or maybe God's Will or inspiration?

God is in the restoration business, giving life where there is no life, offering help where there is no help or little help, offering inspiration to those who can help. And as we grow in faith, this drives our entire being in the midst of everything.

Of course, God never promised what type of restoration we would receive. He just promised that we would have life through Jesus Christ. Making sense out of God's restoration process, God's eternal life, can be confusing at times.

"Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha." Jesus was personal friends with this family. So, when Lazarus began to suffer, they sent for Jesus. "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

Now most people, most family or friends, or certainly physicians, would come immediately to help when hearing the news of someone being ill. Jesus, instead, waits a few days before coming. And, as if that was not confusing enough, he seems, on the surface, to brush this suffering friend off by saying, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Once again, Jesus seems to hit a low with regards to pastoral ministry. Can you imagine calling me as your priest to come visit you in the hospital, and my response being, "Whatever you have is not so bad. It certainly will not lead to death, at least, spiritual death. In other words, you still are going to die, at some point, and this may be it. AND, by the way, you have this illness so that God, so that the Son of God, may be glorified through it. Cheer up! You are doing God's work." I think Jesus would have flunked pastoral ministry 101.

And yet, what is his message here. First, Jesus is offering his disciples an image of what will happen to himself in the near future. Death will not be the end. After his crucifixion and death, he will have life, eternal life with our Lord, giving all of us the opportunity for eternal life.

Second, while on the surface this does not seem very pastoral, the deeper message is that everything, *everything*, joy, happiness and sadness, life and death, health and illness, struggle, pain, confusion, division, unity, everything is for God's glory. Everything is so that other's may know God's glory and strength. This is meant to carry us through the highs and certainly through the lows of life, through the restoration process. Third, Jesus may have passed pastoral ministry 101 a little later when he showed empathy for Lazarus and his family. "He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved...Jesus began to weep." Jesus realizes that life can be hard, and he is here to walk with us through the difficulties. The restoration process is about resurrection. Restoration, in fact, everything that happens in life, is about God's glory. And, in the midst of the restoration, Jesus does care about our pain. And we are led through life.

The story continues.

After two days, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?'"

This is code for "The journey you are about to embark on will be very dangerous. Don't do it!!" But Jesus was all about God's glory, not just being safe in the world. So he inspired them to go.

Continuing with his on-the-surface confusing message, he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.'"

Jesus' disciples thought that Jesus was merely referring to Lazarus being literally asleep. But, instead, he was speaking in metaphor. They did not get it. So Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'" And Thomas, *Thomas*, the one who was always doubting about everything faith-wise, says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him.'" He gets it here.

A life moment: Sometimes we do not get it and sometimes we get it, just like Thomas. And God is with us. But I digress.

This entire experience puts new meaning into life and death and new life for everyone, including us today. We tend to think that life is good and death is bad. We think that health is good and suffering and pain are bad. And, it is. But as Christians, we have a different perspective. We live and we die and we are with God forever. Life is easy and life is very hard and to God be the glory. And the only thing that keeps us grounded is our relationship with God, our ability to live with eternal life as our base, our focus, that gets us through the highs and the lows of life.

"When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days...Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'" AND MARTHA GETS IT! Remember, she was the one who was too busy cleaning and cooking to be with Jesus when he came to visit. She gets it here though. It is not just about life and death on earth. It is about life and death and resurrected life, restoration, eternal life. She says, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I

am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’”

This is our new perspective. Our belief in Jesus, our hope in the Lord, this eternal life will lead us on and inspire us. And that needs to be our focus in everything that we are about, in health and illness, in success and failure, in understanding and in confusion. A life of faith is more about belief and hope than having all the answers, than having it easy in life, with no problems.

And God not only granted Lazarus, through Jesus, eternal life, but also literally raised him from the dead. Jesus came to the tomb and said with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 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.’ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.”

This is not primarily a story about a man who found healing and new life after illness and death. This is a story of about Jesus and God’s Glory in the midst of a constant restoration process. This is a story about people having faith in God through Jesus and therefore finding strength to continue in life, all of life, here and in the world to come. And this is a story about inspiring people to help in the healing process.

To God and to Jesus be the glory, in this strange and sometimes confusing life.