

5th Sunday of Lent

Cycle A, 3.29.20

Ezekiel 37:12-14/Romans 8:8-11/John 11:1-45

CARRYING THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

Death stinks. Martha was right, there is a stench. A family of mice thought to build a nest in the ventilation system of



my car once while it was parked outside for a couple of days. That didn't work out for them once I started the car. Soon the smell was awful. Thankfully removing their corpses, changing the air filter and airing out the car got rid of the odor.

Life sometimes stinks. Whether because of illness, incontinence, poor hygiene, excess cologne or perfume or farm smells like manure or other industrial odors -- sometimes breathing through one's mouth is preferable to the smells in the environment which can be so pungent as to cause gagging or retching. As we endure our stay-at-home COVID-19 restrictions we may not be showering as often, changing our clothes as frequently (if we even get out of our pajamas) or keeping up our daily spiritual routines and, especially, the specific Lenten disciplines we willingly embraced four and a half weeks ago. For many of us our daily routine and structure has simply crumpled. One of our tasks as Christians is to offer our lives as a pleasing fragrance to God. We do not have to do it on our own. God will help us. And other people will help us if we will allow and perhaps ask for the assistance. Our task in

this collectively challenging time is to avoid isolation and laziness and complacency.

Back at the beginning of Lent I preached that perhaps the greatest temptation for many of us was to simply do nothing this Lent. COVID-19 has made Lent more difficult in many ways. It is harder to want to separate ourselves from the vices which offer us short term comfort when our lives are filled with uncertainty and anxiety and are less structured and perhaps are either more communal or more isolated than is our customary lifestyle. There is less incentive to put forth the effort to change when we do not have to go out and face people and can slouch comfortably and unkempt inside our caves.

Years ago I met a man in recovery who has lost everything. His addiction and inappropriate behavior had driven away everyone who loved him and had cost him his job, his possessions and his health. What is truly amazing is that when I met him he was happy, really happy, for perhaps the first time in his life. Written off by many to be as good as dead, he had found new life and was slowly rebuilding trust and his life. He had been called forth from the tomb of his addiction and, with God's grace, was resisting the temptation to fall back into it.



Today, God calls each of us out of our individual tombs, whatever they might be. God calls us to joy and life in abundance, but we have to choose to leave the tombs and sins we know so well and risk being really alive in Christ Jesus. It may be a struggle to leave the tomb. Some of our

tombs may be quite elaborate and seem attractive and even comfortable, but they are still tombs. We may be unwilling to leave them until we recognize them for what they really are. We may not want to give up our sins, but our master is calling us, inviting and encouraging us to come forth from our graves of indifference or boredom or laziness or doubt.

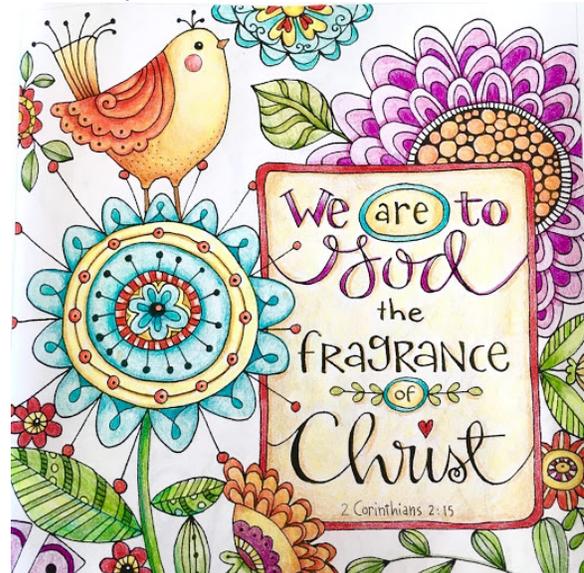


The name Lazarus means, "God helps". God does help us, if we are open to being helped, open to being saved, are willing to pass from death to new life together in Christ Jesus. When Jesus calls Lazarus forth from the tomb, Lazarus probably crawls or hobbles out. Presumably his hands and feet are bound and his face covered since his sister Martha had probably attended carefully to all the details of his burial. He could probably hardly have moved so Jesus tells the people to help him, untie him and set him free.

By baptism we have been given new life in Christ Jesus. We have been set free from the chains of sin and called to a new life lived in faith, hope, and charity. Saint Paul tells us that we are called to live in the Spirit. Living in the Spirit means doing the actions of the Spirit of God: saying and thinking the thoughts that God wants and loving and forgiving as God does. Living in the Spirit means we spend more time helping each other to become free of the shackles of sin – rather than binding one

another -- so that we can together live in the freedom of the children of God. Living in the Spirit means letting go of our pride, anger or whatever stinks in our lives and living kindly and gently in peace with God, ourselves and with one another, confident that God will help us. The miracle of the raising of Lazarus is a challenge to never give up hope even in the most hopeless of situations. It is never too late for God to revive and revitalize a person, a church or a nation, if we will only cooperate with God and make God an unvarying part of our daily lives.

By baptism we have been freed from the stench of death and the reek of sin has been washed away. We are called to help unbind and set one another free, journeying together with Jesus towards the Kingdom of God. With God's grace may we heed the call of Jesus, venture forth from our tombs or caves, be untied, freed, make the most of the remaining days of Lent and offer our lives as a pleasing fragrance to God. May God be blessed.



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