

**Scripture Lesson:** John 11:1-8, 14-26

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 98-99

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it, he said, "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." <sup>5</sup> Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup> after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?"... <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." <sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

**Scripture Lesson:** John 11:28-44

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 99

<sup>28</sup> Martha went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." <sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup> He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup> And Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> 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."

**Response to the Word**

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

All: **Thanks be to God!**

John 11:1-8, 14-26, 28-44  
03/22/2026 – Saginaw First U.M.C.  
“Into the Open”  
Rev. Amy Terhune

“In the summer of 1981, Will Lee, the actor who played an adult character named Mr. Hooper on *Sesame Street*, died. This posed a difficult set of issues for The Children's Television Workshop, who produced the show at the time. Should they deal at all with the subject of death? If so, how would they explain it to their 10 million viewers, most of whom are under the age of six?...

“Child-development experts who specialize in loss and grief provided some specific don'ts for dealing with death on the show: Don't say Mr. Hooper got sick and died, because you don't always die when you get sick. Don't say he was old, because little children think their parents are old. Don't say he went to the hospital and died, because people go to the hospital all the time. The staff also decided to avoid religious issues, such as saying that Mr. Hooper had gone to heaven. What about the do's? Early on they decided that they were going to say a few basic things. He's gone—acknowledge the reality. He won't be back. He'll be missed.

They also wanted the cast to express how they felt about Will. And they wanted the kids to know that death stimulates a full range of emotions—sadness, anger, fear, frustration—sometimes all at the same time. Who better to entrust with that task than Carroll Spinney, who portrayed Big Bird

In one segment, Big Bird walks on camera and says to the cast: “I just drew pictures of all my grown-up friends on Sesame Street and I'm going to give them to you.” He passes out sketches and the cast members ooh and ahh over the likenesses. He's left with Mr. Hooper's picture. “I can't wait till he sees it,” says Big Bird. “Say, where is he? I want to give it to him.”

One cast member explains: “Big Bird, don't you remember? We told you... Mr. Hooper died.”

Big Bird says, “Oh yeah, I remember. Well... I'll give it to him when he comes back.” Another cast member puts an arm around Big Bird to clarify, “Big Bird, Mr. Hooper's not coming back.”

“Why not?” Big Bird asks innocently.

“Big Bird,” explains the cast member, “when people die, they don't come back.” [8 ¶s from Brett Blair, illustrations on John 11:32-44, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

That's reality. That's the very difficult and painful reality of our lives. When people die, they don't come back. Which we know, although statistics suggest that knowing this doesn't necessarily stop us from looking. After we lose someone, we seem to catch glimpses of them all the time—in a passing car, at the grocery store, in a crowd. And then a split second later, we realize: no, that isn't them. But something about what we're seeing reminds us of the one we miss. And they're on our minds. It's part of the grieving process, if I understand it right. Which is a process indeed. When people die, they don't come back. Accepting that is a process.

And then we turn to our gospel lesson today only to discover that once, a long time ago, one did come back. He was dead. Four days dead, which is pretty definitive. And Jesus calls him back to life. It's a bit strange to find this lesson here in Lent. Does it foreshadow Jesus' own death and resurrection? Of course it does. But it still seems out of place. It's a story unique to John's gospel, although we've met these characters before – or at least, Mary and Martha. Mary is the one who sits at Jesus feet to learn just like one of his disciples. He commends her for it. But it's interesting to me that in the wake of her brother's death, she is as forgetful as all the other disciples. She can't seem to see beyond her grief. Martha is the workaholic – the one cleaning and cooking. She's also the one with a temper who demands that Jesus send her sister to help. In our lesson today, Jesus himself is the one on the hot seat – the object of her temper and her anger. 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.” Which suggests to me that since that spat with her sister, she’s done some listening, she taken in some truth, she gets it. Despite everything – the delay, the grief, the frustration – she trusts Jesus.

Maybe because she’s seen him work, and maybe because she knows her own history. Elijah raised a widow’s son to life. Elisha did the same. Abraham found a ram to replace the sacrifice of his son Isaac. Jonah is brought up again from the belly of a whale. The psalmists speak again and again about being lifted from Sheol and raised out of the pit. And Ezekiel sees a vision of dry bones clattering together, with flesh and sinews and skin growing on them, death in reverse, and the Spirit of God blows, and the whole multitude inhales the breath of life, and this becomes the promise of what God will do for a defeated nation in exile. Life, hope, newness, energy, breath, resurrection. It’s not just a Jesus thing. God has been doing this for millennia. And so Jesus rightly tells Martha, “I am...” I am... God’s very name—Yahweh—I am! The great I AM who breathed life into Adam and Eve, who parted the Red Sea and thundered upon the mountain, who controls the sea and makes dry bones become living human beings, the Great I AM speaks. “*I am* the resurrection and the life.” The God of the universe speaks through the lips of her friend Jesus of Nazareth. And she knows it. Unlike Peter, who must be prompted (“so who do you say that I am?”) Martha falls to her knees and declares, “You are the Messiah, the son of God!”

Life is what God does. Life is what Jesus does. He engages. He connects. He digs in. Look at Jesus’ reaction to the pain of those he cared for. Mary and Martha are grieving. The brother that has looked out for them their whole lives is gone. Not only are they now feeling the emptiness, the profound loneliness, the range of emotions that come with grief, but they are destitute, for women by themselves in that society faced enormous financial hardships. Jesus enters into all those emotions along with them. The record is very clear here. It’s the shortest verse in all scripture: Jesus began to weep. In the old King James, it was even shorter: Jesus wept. Jesus, who was there when the earth was made and the stars flung to furthest reaches of infinity; Jesus, who crammed his divinity into flesh and blood; Jesus who may well have recognized that the road which began at Bethlehem would end at Golgotha; Jesus, who knew the Great I AM as ‘Abba’ Father; who knew the power of the Lord to bring life—this same Jesus wept at a tomb just like you and I. Why? It certainly wasn’t because he doubted God’s ability to work resurrection. It was because it hurts! It was because he loved these two women, and he loved their brother. Their pain was his pain. Our pain is his pain. We don’t suffer alone.

Jesus hears their grief, their anger, their distress. He understands. He’ll never reject us for struggling to make sense of it all. He gives them permission to voice their complaint.

“Rev. Shannon J. Kershner, a Presbyterian pastor, tells of a parishioner named Jane who was battling severe clinical depression. Some of you know what that is like. Jane felt like she was sitting at the bottom of a deep hole. It was dark and big and she felt so small.

“Jane sat there in that pit, feeling betrayed and angry with herself and with God. Kershner was fresh out of seminary and had become well acquainted with the Lament Psalms—those psalms in the Bible that let it all hang out in regards to anger and frustration with God. She pulled a few of them out and began to read them with Jane. She said, “See? What you feel is right here in Scripture. It is faithful to feel this way. These psalms help remind us that God is in the pit with us. Even when you feel God’s absence, God’s presence still covers you.”

“Kershner said she was trying to speak faithfully and truthfully to this woman. But Jane looked up at her and said through her tears, “Shannon, I don’t want a God who will sit with me in the pit. I want a God who will pull me out of it.” [3 ¶s from [www.woodhavenpres.org/Sermons/03-13-05.pdf](http://www.woodhavenpres.org/Sermons/03-13-05.pdf); as adapted from “No More Tears” by King Duncan, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] I can certainly understand that, can’t you? So we turn to John 11, and we find a God who not only joins us in the pit, in the stink, in the

tomb, one who not only hears and understands our bitterness, our frustration, our sorrow, but one who also rolls back the stone and calls us out of it.

In her book *Coming Into the World*, Beth Quick writes, “Notice that Jesus speaks of himself as the resurrection and the life, before he is crucified and raised in the scriptural accounts. Rather than predicting a future event, he is speaking to the fact that he is currently at that time the resurrection. He is already raising people out of death, to new life. He is already transforming people, so that their lives become like nothing they could recognize before.” [from illustrations for John 11:1-45, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

But we need to understand that the miraculous and amazing work of God among us is not always recognized for what it is – Good news. When Lazarus came stumbling out of that tomb into the open, the scribes, the Pharisees, the roman authorities – they saw danger. They saw chaos. They saw a threat. And they’re not wrong. Rev. Lori Wagner says it much better than I could. She writes:

“God’s miracles ARE threats, aren’t they? Sure they are. God’s miracles are real, BIG threats to people who can’t recognize God or respect God’s kingdom.

“God’s miracle of raising up is a threat to greed and power.

“God’s miracle of unbinding is a threat to control and order.

“God’s miracle of the unexpected is a threat to the status quo.

“God’s miracle of revealing is a threat to secrecy and hiddenness.

“God’s miracle of restoration is a threat to privilege and profit

“God’s miracle of proclamation is a threat to sin and silencing.

“God’s miracle of renewal is a threat to what’s familiar and comfortable

“God’s miracle of life and light is a threat to the shadowed valleys of death.

“Jesus IS the Lord of Light come out of the shadows to face the final threat. [adapted from “Lazarus Rising” by Lori Wagner, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] And Lazarus is his harbinger, his thrown gauntlet in the ring. It’s out in the open now. Do you get what I’m trying to communicate here? This is about more than our personal lives. This is about the systems and connections that shape us. Life comes to individuals in desperate. Life also comes to the world around us.

We’ve only been shown a very short clip of the epic saga of time. We know the basic plotline: we know that life and not death is the ultimate culmination of all that is and will be. We know that a day will come when swords will be beat into plowshares, when the lion will lie down with the lamb, the Palestinian will eat lunch with the Israeli and students from Tibet and China will learn together in peace. We know the day is coming when people will be judged for their character and not their race or ethnicity or gender or sexual identity. We know the day is coming, but right now, death surrounds us. Its stench is palpable in the hatred, bigotry and confusion. We know that when people die, they don’t come back. But they do rise up. Energy doesn’t decompose. Souls don’t deteriorate. Spirit doesn’t rot. This is the gospel faith.

“Lazarus, come out!” And out he came, still all wrapped up in those moldy, sticky, crusty, rancid grave clothes. Lazarus came out still bound to death, for he could not shed his humanness. None of us can. There are so many things that bind us to death. Fear, money, hatred, lust, and a hunger for power. They stick to us, they bind us up, they make us gag but we can’t get free of them. Yet if you skip ahead a couple of chapters, you’ll remember that Jesus left his grave clothes in the tomb and came out free. Death just doesn’t stick to Jesus. And his voice calls us out into the open. His voice calls us to believe in what seems impossible. His voice calls us to rise above fear, above despair, above resignation and brokenness and bondage. It calls us to hope and courage and newness. It calls us to cast off the rancor and rise to the fullness of all we’re created to be. It calls us to resurrection. It’s not just for Easter. It’s for life. Thanks be to God! Amen.