
Resurrection Takes Time, Resurrection Takes Work

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Fifth Sunday in Lent – Year A

I was with a former parishioner this past Friday. She has moved out of town, and I am thrilled to say that she is a faithful member of her present congregation. She politely asked me if I had prepared my sermon for today. I replied that I am always preparing my sermon, even up to the last minute. “Well, it sure is a long gospel,” she observed, and I admired that she had already read the text. Yes, she said, her *lectio divina* group had also been praying with it this past week. “It’s long,” she said.

She was right. Today’s gospel reading is long! It is a resurrection story, and it is as grand as the resurrection story of Jesus. This is the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, and the brother of the two great sisters, Mary and Martha.

The story is long because it includes details. It doesn’t just say that Lazarus came to life. It is not merely a one sentence statement of the event. It is not merely a summary, for the files. It includes details, and these details are what make the story a great one. It is these details that can offer us features of what resurrection means.

So, I present two particular features of resurrection details that this story describes. The two features are these: One, resurrection takes time. Resurrection takes time. And the second feature is that resurrection takes work. Resurrection needs help.

Feature One: The resurrection of Lazarus took three or four days. After Jesus was informed that Lazarus had died, it looks like Jesus took his own sweet time. He waited two days. He was not in a hurry at all. He didn’t join the anxiety. He wasn’t checking his cell phone for constant text messages about Lazarus’s condition. Resurrection takes time.

Four days. There has to be time. For instance, there has to be time to weep. “Jesus wept.” In the pains of our lives, in the deaths of our lives, in the sadnesses and disappointments of our lives, there has to be time to weep. Take time to cry.

There has to be time to grieve. There has to be time to love. Sometimes it is when we miss people, when they are absent, that we realize what love is. Sometimes it is when we grieve, that we realize that love is. Take time to love. There has to be time to remember love. Jesus loved Lazarus.

The second feature, or lesson, that this resurrection story provides us, is that resurrection takes work. Resurrection needs help.

And here is where I point out one of the strangest features of this miracle of Jesus. It is obviously a miracle, one of the great miracles of Jesus. “Roll away the stone!” Jesus declares, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man came out. Wow! He is alive!

But I have always been strangely fascinated by how Lazarus came forth. Scripture says, “the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.”

He came forth still bound in the burial clothes! Lazarus is resurrected, but he is still bound! He is tied up, still tangled up! Couldn’t Jesus have loosed Lazarus from his burial clothes when Jesus resurrected him? No, Jesus didn’t present Lazarus unbound. Jesus says, “Unbind him, and let him go!”

So it is, that, for the resurrection of Lazarus to be complete, Jesus somehow needed the help of other people. This detail presents an ongoing feature of resurrections. There are resurrected people all around us who still need to be unbound! There are people all around us who experience new life, but who are still tied up.

If resurrection is going to be complete, Jesus needs others, Jesus needs us, to unbind people. And we ourselves, are so often bound up in things ourselves. Even when we are living in new life, we can be bound up in the clothing of the old life!

Jesus needs our help for the miracle to be complete. Jesus needs our help for Easter to happen. The resurrection needs work. The resurrection needs the help of others.

This feature is a part of other miracle stories of Jesus, too. Before Jesus could provide wine at Cana wedding feast, he had to ask someone to bring the water jars! Before Jesus could feed five thousand people he had to ask for five loaves of bread and two fishes. And before Jesus could fully give resurrection to Lazarus, Jesus had to ask people to unbind him, and to let him go.

Miracles in Christianity are wonderful! They are signs of power and new life! But, in Jesus, miracles do not happen without our action, without our participation! Resurrection takes work!

In a few weeks, we will sing again the wonderful Easter hymn, "Now the green blade riseth!" Now the green blade riseth ...But not at first! The good things in new life take time to grow. A strong body takes time to build. Yes, even the resurrection, even the resurrection body, takes time. The dry bones coming together, that Ezekiel talks about. Remember them? The knee bone connected to the thigh bone, the thigh bone connected to the hip bone, sinews and flesh and skin growing on them -- all that takes time. They didn't just jump up like toy dancing skeletons. Their coming together took time.

Today, there are lots of empires, and lots of people, straining to express their power by destroying things. But new life, the resurrection, is not about destroying things, or disrupting things. The resurrection is about growing things. And growing things takes time!

Any two-year old can disrupt something. Any two-year old can tear something down. Any two-year old can destruct something. (Just ask their older siblings who just finished a glorious tower of blocks.)

Yes, any two-year-old can destruct something. But it takes an older person, a twenty-two year old, a forty-two year old, a sixty-two year old, to construct something. It takes a wise person, who knows how to use help, to create new life. A wise person takes their time.

We are two weeks before Easter, the grand celebration of new life, the day of resurrection. But the time and the work of resurrection have already begun. We are studying stories, saying our prayers, working to prepare the way. Setting up flower arrangements, cleaning altar things, visiting the sick, serving the poor. We are taking our time, and we are putting in the work. We are unbinding people, letting them go. We are unbinding ourselves and letting go of the old burial clothes.

Join us! Lend a hand. Take some time. Join the people of God who are participating in the miracle of new life every day.

AMEN.