

5th Sunday of Lent • A
Christ the King • March 28-29, 2009

For the past three weeks, our Gospel readings have given us mirrors to look at ourselves. We have been faced with the ultimate questions of life. We had the woman at the well seeking living water, and then the man born blind seeking insight. Today with the story of Lazarus we come face to face with the most haunting human question: is there life after death.

Death is such a stark, brutal reality. It has been a part of the human reality since the beginning of time. What do we do with the death of a loved one, the death of friend, or our own mortality? What does God's renewing, living water and a seeing, believing faith say when death stares us in the face?

Today's Gospel holds before us a mirror in which we see our own morality, the questions death raises, and the promise that God gives us in our Lord Jesus Christ. So what does this story tell us?

Maybe it is best to consider first what this story is not telling us. For one thing, the story is not suggesting that death is not real. It is not saying that Lazarus somehow got a free pass on death and is still walking around today. Death is real. Though Lazarus was raised from the grave, he died some years later, according to Christian legend. Nor does the story deny the gnawing pain that death brings. No, the cold, harsh and stark reality is that human life ends in death. Remember that even Jesus weeps at the death of his friend.

But that is not the all that the story teaches. This story tells us that even though death is real, it is not all-powerful nor is it the end. Next week, we enter Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum: Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. We will follow Jesus fully aware that he will die, but just as fully aware that death is not the end of the story, but only the beginning.

We journey from Samaria to Jerusalem, from Bethany to Calvary following the One whose life, death and resurrection offers great hope.

Because we discover that Jesus stands outside every grave in which we have been entombed and He speaks our Name.

Take the stone away, come out!

The One who died and rose again calls us from
the grave of self-pity and self-doubt,
the tomb of selfishness and guilt,
the cemetery of failure and blindness,
and yes, even the crypt of terrifying fear and even death itself.

He calls us by name and tells us that we shall live. **Take the stone away, come out!** We shall live because of his life and his grace. We shall live today, tomorrow and forever. Our Lord Jesus Christ not only speaks death into submission, but also dares to enter death's silent grip to lead us beyond death into life that is transformed by grace now and forever.

Take the stone away, come out!

Adapted from *You Shall Live*. GraceWorks. March 9, 2008.