

Ezekiel 37:1-10, 14 John 11:17-45

March 22/26

Whenever Jesus shows up, the dead come to life, things open up, and there is Easter. At least, that's the way it always seems to work.

I was with Jesus when the news came from his friends, Mary and Martha, that his friend, their brother, Lazarus, was very ill and dying. I watched him absorb the news. Then he looked around at those who were pressing in on him. After a few minutes, it was as though he had reached a decision. For two days, Jesus continued to teach and to heal. Then, finally, he began to make his way to Bethany, to the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

I wanted to go and see what he had meant when he said that what was happening was for the glory of God.

When we arrived at last, Martha ran to us - angry, weeping, disillusioned, despairing. "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died!"

Gently, Jesus began to talk with her. We had to lean very close to hear him. "Your brother will rise again," he said.

"I know he'll rise on the day of resurrection," Martha concurred.

"Ah, yes," Jesus continued. Then looking lovingly into Martha's face, he said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Any who believe in me shall live, even though they die; and any who live and believe in me, will never die."

I stood, perplexed, wondering at his words. Then he asked, "Martha, do you believe this?" As I strained to hear Martha's answer, I speculated, "How would I answer, if he suddenly asked me?"

Martha's voice was quiet, yet firm and strong. "I do believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, who was to come into the world." But what did that mean, I continued to muse? What did that mean, here and now, and for Lazarus? For any of us, for that matter? Had Jesus somehow moved the time line on resurrection? We had always been taught that resurrection is some time in the future, in the sweet by-and-by. But this, "I am the resurrection and the life" thing that Jesus said - did that mean, did Martha somehow interpret it to mean, that resurrection is now, present, in the flesh, face-to-face in front of us all, that life coming out of death happens whenever/wherever Jesus is present?

Martha went off to get Mary and while Jesus was comforting them both, in tears himself, we began to move toward the tomb where Lazarus was buried. Into the silence, Jesus quietly commanded that the stone across the mouth of the tomb be removed. The gasp from Martha was echoed in each of our hearts. Thinking that Jesus simply wanted to see the body of his friend, Martha protested, "But, Master, he has been buried four days. By now, surely he will stink."



Without wavering, Jesus waited for the stone to be moved, and with meaningful hesitation, some of the mourners set about the task of removing it.

We waited - for Jesus to go into the cave - to see the body of his friend. Instead, Jesus lifted his eyes to the heavens and stood praying to God. Then, looking directly at the mouth of the tomb, he cried out, "Lazarus, Lazarus, come forth!"

The chill that raced up my spine and through my whole body, I shall never forget. My mind said that it was impossible. Yet, I saw it with my own eyes. With the grave clothes still wound around him, his eyes still heavily wrapped, Lazarus emerged from the cave.

How? What? My head spun with inexplicable questions. Did Jesus have power over even death? What was happening? What would happen next?

I don't know what I was expecting, but I assure you, it wasn't to be told to go to Lazarus and to loose him from the encasing grave clothes. If Jesus could cause Lazarus to rise from death, why, I wondered, didn't he just dispose of the grave garments himself? Why get us involved in the thing?

Quickly, it became evident that, for whatever reasons, Jesus had no intention of unwrapping Lazarus' body. So, some of us moved forward - admittedly, with misgivings and apprehension. But, you know, as I helped to loosen the bindings, I knew a growing excitement. It was so real to me - Jesus may have raised Lazarus's body, but somehow I was part of making it possible for Lazarus to live. Indeed, Jesus' words kept welling up inside me with every round I made with the wrappings - "Unloose him, and let him live."

A lot of people who had been unsure about Jesus before that day, now believed. But some went straight to the Pharisees, to the powers-that-be, the defenders of the status quo, the watchdogs who kept everybody in place and everything tied down. And they immediately called a meeting. They seemed to be in a state of panic. There was a raging anger toward Jesus. And a hatred. With profound sadness, as I looked at their faces, I thought - it's going to be all downhill for Jesus now.

Why couldn't they understand what was happening, and celebrate, and praise and glorify God? The same God who brought creation out of nothing, brought life out of death, right before our eyes. This God they were trying to defend needs no defence. Rather, all he longs for is to come to us when we find ourselves in places filled with dry bones and when the stench of death overwhelms us.

Celebrate, praise, glorify? Sadly - no! Indeed not! Because, "... from that day on they planned to put him to death."