

ARRRGH, MAKE IT STOP! I don't know about you, but I can't wait for election day to be over. I realize that sometime later this week that one half of the U.S. population will be disappointed with the results of the election, that's how close this election is. What might this familiar reading of the raising of Lazarus have to do in this time of such polarization and fear?

On this festival of All Saints' which character in the story helps us understand what it is to be a saint? Who do you identify with? Mary is grief stricken and makes an accusation: "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died?*" Maybe Mary represents all of us who come to church today remembering departed loved ones. For some it is with the grief of loss so fresh to the point of being overwhelmed.

Is it Martha, who had asked the same question only moments earlier, and then witnessed her question and grief transformed into a courageous confession "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day*" – and a particular confession in Jesus, who promised her life here and now: "*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world*". Perhaps Martha stands for all those whose faith in Jesus seems incredibly resilient and who serve as encouragers for the rest of us.

Maybe it's Lazarus, the one called forth from the tomb. Lazarus stands as the promise of Jesus literally embodied, one whom death had taken...but couldn't hold onto. He serves as a testimony to Jesus' power over death and each of us has met people who have come through such difficult circumstances that they may well be a contemporary Lazarus for us.

Of course, there is Jesus, the one who gives life, who calls us out of death; the one who weeps for Lazarus and his sisters. He is the one who, in raising Lazarus, starts the chain of events that will lead to his own death; the one, finally, in whom death itself cannot contain. "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" Jesus raises Lazarus and helps us understand the fresh import of the promise of resurrection that stands at the center of every Sunday celebration, particularly on this Festival of All Saints.

And there is one other, actually a group: the crowd who witnessed Lazarus resurrection and whom Jesus commands: "*Unbind him, and let him go!*" I find this part of the story particularly compelling because it reminds me that even God's work of resurrection is not quite complete without our participation, with out our being caught up in the act itself.

It's not that God needs us to do God's work of Resurrection, it's that God's work of Resurrection isn't limited simply to the one being raised but finds its fulfillment as it catches up and transforms those who witness and are drawn into it.

"*Unbind him, and let him go!*" This is an invitation drawing us into God's life-giving work, to participate in, and extend the reach of God's mighty acts. It is a promise that Resurrection is not simply a matter of "then" but is also a matter of "now." Now there is something to do. Now we find courage to live even in the midst of fear. Now we sense God's promise of life helping us not only live in the shadow of death with confidence but to resist the power of death.

It reminds me of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a saint in the truest sense. In 1986, Tutu preached in the cathedral in Johannesburg surrounded by armed police and soldiers on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the Soweto uprising. The security forces were bracing for possible racial violence. Tutu told the representatives of apartheid, "Since you have already lost, I invite you today to come and join the winning side!". The congregation was transformed by Tutu's challenge, leaping to their feet and shouting praises to God. They then danced out of the

cathedral to meet the police and military forces. The police and military backed up to provide space for the people to dance for freedom in the streets.

And in less dramatic form, I saw a congregation being transformed by resurrection faith last Sunday as we began to unwind those grave cloths of Lazarus. Your honest and vulnerable conversation about the bell tower, helped us begin a new chapter leading to new life together.

God's promise of resurrection isn't an invitation to deny death – the death rate in our community is still the same: 100%. God's promise of resurrection does grant us the power to defy it: to defy death's ability to overshadow and distort our lives, to deny death's threat that there is nothing else, to deny those who believe because they have the ability to inflict death they are the most powerful people on earth. This story, and the Easter story it prefigures, promises that death does not have the last word, and that we are free to live now, to struggle now, to sacrifice now, to encourage others, to live out of a place of love now, and to have our actions directed by hope now!

In light of God's resurrection promise, death no longer terrifies us, not the death of the loved ones we remember on this day, nor our own. Because of God's resurrection promise, the life we share in this world here and now no longer terrifies us either. Storms and natural disasters of unprecedented magnitude, the massacre of innocents, the politics of fear and division, the rhetoric of hate – these are heart wrenching elements of our life in the world, AND they do not have the last word. Prompted by God's promise of Resurrection we can stand against them, hold onto each other amid them, and offer testimony rooted in life and love that runs contrary to the testimony of the world.

Today, after giving thanks for those saints who have gone before us, who are now in the nearer presence of God, we turn our attention more directly to the saints sitting beside or in front of us. We who have heard the word of Resurrection, we are called to unbind all those bound by the fear of death and release those who struggle to find hope. God who raised Jesus from the dead invites us to participate in, extend, and even complete God's Resurrection work by caring for, standing with, and lending our courage to those who are suffering and grieving, those who are most vulnerable and in need.

We have before us, a veritable host of saints who have work to do, a call to answer, a Resurrection life to lead here, now. "Unbind him, and let him go!" is our mandate, for God who answered Jesus' prayer in bringing Lazarus forth from the tomb, God who raised Jesus from death, God who promises us life eternal. This God is not finished yet and we are the instruments of God's Resurrection life, grace, and power here, now.

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