

John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But 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." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus 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." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I 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." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The 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."

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

This has been a hard core lent – The Lentiest – lent ever as a friend said. For most of us we gave up far more than we ever intended – as the coronavirus has made its way into our daily lives.

We gave up gathering in person – this morning our beautiful sanctuary sits empty - I miss seeing you all – the hustle and bustle of Sunday mornings.

We've been at this for a while now – in some ways routines are starting to emerge, a new normal is taking place – there are some good things about these rhythms – where life is simplified.

But it is still hard – and if you're feeling that you're not alone – I want to tell you that no one knows how to do this – we are all just figuring it out one day at a time – myself included . The schedule I had for this week fell apart without childcare and when one of my co-workers who swallowed a coin (she's ok).

I've been grateful for daily walks and sunshine when we can get it – but even this is hard - because have you tried to walk down the sidewalk with 3 kids – riding an assortment of bikes, scooters, or wagons? and a dog – and then try to maintain social distance? We are like an amoeba taking up a whole block – our unpredictable presence sends people scurrying to the other side of the street for shelter.

And for many of us who are fortunate enough (I say fortunate because I know many have already been laid off) to be working – we’ve had to radically adapt our work patterns –
Health care workers, first responders, grocery store and essential workers – have all rapidly shifted into crisis management and for many of us we are trying out working at home over new mediums and technology -
Teachers I especially am feeling you and give thanks for you – as you move to online distance learning.
We’ve had 3 weeks of online worship – each week we’ve done it in a completely different way – this week I fumbled through teaching myself two new platforms that I had never even heard of before Wednesday.

All of this is hard my friends – because it’s the first time. Brene Brown has a term for all of this – she calls this moment – an FFT – I’ll let you guess on the first F – but the rest of it is first time -- We are all in a collective FFT as we cope with the pandemic – we don’t have a previous experience to draw on — and it’s led to a whole bunch of other new FFTs –

Physical distancing
Homeschooling
Video conferencing
Working from home
Stay at home order

it’s all new!! we feel awkward, we fumble through, we are anxious – and we feel vulnerable because we don’t know what we are doing! And that’s normal – Brene Brown’s point is that recognizing that we are in this first-time moment – assures us that it’s not always going to be as hard it is as first – and allows grace to enter in

Now we have a choice – we can acknowledge that this is hard and messy – or we can go deny it, stuff it down and pretend things are fine – we’ve seen this crop up on the national scene-

There have been those who have called for economic activity to resume as usual on Easter – side note- that seems about the last day of the year that we should aspire to return to our consumer-centric ways in order to reestablish the empire ... and more than that this premise is not rooted in the wisdom of those who do know – scientists and doctors who are the true experts we have in this moment.

Additionally failure to acknowledge the fragility of this moment – leads to another kind of Contagion – this one born of fear and expressed in the form of xenophobia or racism – This contagion is rooted in the desire to blame someone -for the pandemic and can spread faster than the virus itself -- if we do not stand up against it.

The alternative is to acknowledge – that this is the first time we’ve dealt with anything like this and it’s hard, and scary at times – but it doesn’t have to paralyze us if we can lean into the mess and the awkwardness – and allow ourselves – as Heather often says to – “feel all the feelings”

We have to allow ourselves time and space to simply feel what we are feeling, to sit with the emotions that are rising up for us -

There’s a terrific article you may have seen this week – from the Harvard Business Review called – This Discomfort Your feeling – is grief.

The article interviews – David Kessler one of the world’s foremost expert on grief. He co-wrote with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross [On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss.](#)

He said, “We feel the world has changed, and it has. We know this is temporary, but it doesn’t feel that way, and we realize things will be different. The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we’re grieving. Collectively.”

Kessler – suggests that we are feeling many types of grief including a grief called Anticipatory grief – Anticipatory grief is that feeling we get about what the future holds when we’re uncertain.

There’s something bad out there – like a devastating diagnosis or impending storm. Kessler say “With a virus, this kind of grief is so confusing for people. Our primitive mind knows something bad is happening, but you can’t see it. This breaks our sense of safety. We’re feeling that loss of safety. I don’t think we’ve collectively lost our sense of general safety like this. Individually or as smaller groups, people have felt this. But all together, this is new. We are grieving on a micro and a macro level.

The grief we feel in this moment will show up in all its forms – denial, sadness, anger, bargaining, and acceptance – it's not linear – we'll bounce around. We eventually get to acceptance -- We find control there.
I can wash my hands. I can keep a safe distance. I can learn how to work virtually.

Kessler – in his new book adds - added a 6th stage to the grief process called - meaning making—I very much like this concept and have often talked about it with people who are grieving –This stage is about finding meaning in those darkest hours. A belief that light is possible even in those moments.

This stage makes sense to us as people faith – in fact –at Hamline Church we've often spoken of Meaning Making as spiritual practice, a way of being in the world that calls us to constantly look for the presence of God at work in our lives and in the world – rooted in the expectation that God is always with us – we just need to be intentional to see it.
Our scripture story today is about seeing the presence, or the Glory of God –
We know Jesus often taught in parables to explain things – we see this often in the stories about Jesus in Matthew, Mark, and Luke – but not John. Instead, in John it's as though Jesus shapes events around him into living, breathing parables, “signs” through which larger realities can be glimpsed.

You see - John is all about meaning making – he understands faith, as a pair of spectacles to see through.
The raising of Lazarus is the 7th sign --

Martha and Mary – send word to their friend Jesus that their brother – his good friend – is sick. Jesus waits a couple of days before going to Judea—and by the time he arrives – Lazarus has already died.

Martha & Mary both – clearly thinks Jesus could have stopped this – if you had been here my brother would not have died.

Jesus tries to assure them – that their brother will rise again, not only will Jesus cause Lazarus' resurrection, he somehow is resurrection: “I am the resurrection and the life,” he says to Martha
Here's something interesting – even though Jesus knows that Lazarus will rise again --

when Jesus sees Mary and their other friends crying – he famously cries too – he weeps.

Why would he cry if –knows that he's going to raise Lazarus back to life?

I don't know but I'm guessing it's because he's feeling all the feelings –

Washed in grief just like you or I would be. Fully God and fully human – maybe Jesus is feeling the first tie – the FFT jitters – maybe it's the first time that he has lost someone he's loved so much, maybe it's because it's his first time raising someone from the dead – (side note there is only one other story in the Bible about Jesus raising someone from the dead – anyone know who that was? And it was in the gospel of Luke – daughter of Jairus) Or maybe it's because he knows his own death is not far off?

Whatever it is – this is a new, grief filled space for Jesus and he weeps

As the story continues – Martha's skepticism returns - When Jesus commands the stone to be rolled away from the tomb, Martha's points to the stench as evidence that Lazarus is truly, completely, four-days-worth dead. Jesus turns to her and says, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

The key to the passage, and in a sense to John's Gospel as a whole, is contained in this question. Jesus isn't saying, If you believe, the glory of God will shine. After all, despite Martha's skepticism, Jesus raises Lazarus; God's glory shines forth in any case! The issue is whether or not Martha will truly see it. She'll see her brother raised from the dead, that's for sure - but will she see it for what it truly is, “the glory of God,” a sign post pointing to Jesus' identity and mission? If she believes in Jesus as “the resurrection and the life,” and so interprets, makes meaning of her brother's rising as a glimpse of that larger reality, she will. She will see God's glory. She will catch sight of Jesus' identity and mission.

The seven “signs” in John point beyond themselves to even bigger, deeper realities about who Jesus is and what he’s all about – his death and resurrection is considered the 8th.

To John - Faith, we might say, is a pair of glasses through which we can see dimensions of God’s glory we might otherwise miss.

Friends – even in this life changing, generation defining FFT moment – where the weight of fear and death – push down upon us – the glory of God is still apparent – because God is still with us and among us.

We just need to put on our spectacles – our Glory of God detecting glasses --

For this final week of Lent and as we prepare ourselves for Holy Week – I’m going to invite you to the spiritual practice of meaning making – of looking at this moment through the lens of faith to see where the Glory of God is breaking in – because there in that place is where we find hope:

You may have had some inklings of this already –

Technology bringing you together in new ways, long phone calls, and walks – the kindness of strangers –

It reorders our work and family time – perhaps a little more to the way it should be

And the thing about our God – is that God invites us to join in this work – to ourselves be bearers of the light in the darkest moments – This week I invite you to

Who can I connect with?

How can I help?

Who can I pray for?

Friends yes we are in the middle of the awkwardness of a first time – it’s hard – it brings us grief, but you are not alone – and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus points us to the Glory of God all around us – if we put on our glory of God glasses we can see it too.

Closing Prayer

Resources:

<https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-on-ffts/>

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief?ab=hero-subleft-3>

Salt Collective Commentary