

#27

June 10, 2018

Living Well

Part1 – “Something stinks, but it is not Lazarus”

11:1 A certain man, Lazarus, was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying, “Lord, the one whom you love is ill.”

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, “This illness isn’t fatal. It’s for the glory of God so that God’s Son can be glorified through it.” ⁵ Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ When he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was. After two days, ⁷ he said to his disciples, “Let’s return to Judea again.”

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

¹⁸ Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁹ Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother’s death. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary remained in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. ²² Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you.”

²³ Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha replied, “I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ She replied, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God’s Son, the one who is coming into the world.”

²⁸ After she said this, she went and spoke privately to her sister Mary, “The teacher is here and he’s calling for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. ³⁰ He hadn’t entered the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were comforting Mary in the house saw her get up quickly and leave, they followed her. They assumed she was going to mourn at the tomb.

³² When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. ³⁴ He asked, “Where have you laid him?”

They replied, “Lord, come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus began to cry. ³⁶ The Jews said, “See how much he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Remove the stone.”

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, “Lord, the smell will be awful! He’s been dead four days.”

⁴⁰ Jesus replied, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believe, you will see God’s glory?” ⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. ⁴² I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.”

I am so grateful for the time of rest and vacation. Thank you to the preachers who said “Yes” and proclaimed the message while letting me have these Sunday’s just to listen. I greatly appreciate having the best church, best leaders and such support.

For the next seven weeks we will be considering how to live well. The sermons will be based and inspired by the book we read and studied in Bible study. It is called “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality” by Peter Scazzero. I know the name sounds intimidating and the subject seems too deep. Emotion, Health and Spirit – what a scary combination. But Christianity is not a shallow or surface matter. Salvation comes from word healing. It is a deep transformation. It is renewal which brings new life to those who believe. It is a process and it is a journey we are all called to walk. I encourage you to remain patient. Even if you disagree with me or think it is a nonsense or it is not for you, stay with us and let us see. Maybe there is something for all us to help each one of us grow.

What does it mean to live? What does it mean to live well? Why are so many of us only Christians on Sunday? Why are so many Christians not so nice to be around? Why do we do not live the lives God intended us to live?

For us to live well we have to look at the five dimensions of our lives, also called the wellness wheel. (Physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional). So many of us, including me, have learned how not to pay much attention to our emotions. Since childhood I have learned and practiced ignoring my emotions. They are just distracting me from life and from living life well.

When feeling sad, I quote: “Rejoice always”. When feeling angry – “blessed are the peacemakers”, fear – “do not fear, for I am Lord.” The problem is that if we do not acknowledge them, if we do not deal with them, they will ruin us from inside or sometimes will come as explosion in the wrong time and wrong place. How many of you need this?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2yl_Ml6GmE

Why do we neglect emotion? I am certain God created us with emotions and feelings for a reason. I believe God uses and speaks through our emotions. Emotions are not given for us to ignore them. So many of us are so good at pretending that we hardly know who we are anymore. We become emotionally undeveloped. In his book, Peter Scazzero writes: It is impossible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

Last weekend we went to the zoo. The kids loved seeing all those animals and were excited to see the dolphin show. We got the tickets early because the seats are limited and we did not want to miss. We wanted good seats so we went in 30 minutes early. We did, sat very close to the pool, but not too close (We did not want to get wet). We found the perfect seats. It is not easy just to wait with three kids. We waited as patiently as possible. The place filled up.

Just a few minutes before the show I saw a family coming – a very pregnant mom, dad and little kid. Obviously, there were very few options left. On the same bench where we sat there were a few places in the very corner.

You probably know, how fast thoughts go. So my thoughts went something like this: Well, maybe I can be nice and get up and let them sit in the corner, in the very end of our bench, we will all have to stand and probably move to let them in, but we can do it. I also think, maybe they can find somewhere else to sit.

The thoughts go fast and I think they could have come earlier. We came earlier. All the thoughts fly through my mind and the feelings merge with these thoughts: a little bit of annoyance and a little bit compassion. Then God, who works in our messy heads and feelings, suddenly challenges me. WHY won't you move to the corner and let them sit in your place? Oh, I did not like that thought. But I knew it was the right thing to do so. I knew I did not have to do it, but deeper inside of me I was certain what I needed to do.

Nobody heard or saw my feelings. But there is so much that happens inside of us that matters. As in the book “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality”, we see the top of the iceberg, but beneath the water is the true mountain. To “explore the iceberg” is to look beneath the surface

of our lives, identifying the hidden but powerful forces that shape the way we navigate choices and relationships. By acknowledging and naming these realities, we raise our emotional awareness, which in turn enables us to process our emotions in a healthy way, and to integrate them into our discernment of God's will.

If we ignore anger, sadness, fear, if we pretend to be who we are not, if we "sweep feelings under the rug" we have emotionally unhealthy people, who start to "leak":

- People who say one thing to your face and another behind your back
- make promises, but have no intention of keeping
- blame
- attack
- become sarcastic
- say yes, when they mean no
- avoid, withdraw, cut off...

The list is endless. The Bible uses a word for this type of behavior of pretending – hypocrisy.

Let us look at the example to whom we all agree we should be looking. It is at Jesus. How did Jesus, true God and true human, deal with emotions? Today we will take a journey with today's text from John.

It is a well-known story. It displays the power of Christ and is as a climax in John's gospel introducing the resurrection of Jesus, himself. It is important to note that Jesus had recently left Jerusalem because people had gone so far as to pick up rocks with which to stone him to death for the blasphemy of claiming to be God. He went to Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John the Baptist had baptized people. It is good idea to go back to our own baptism to get our bearings when troubled or challenged.

So when Jesus heard that Lazarus, whom he loved, was ill, he stayed where he was for three more days. We will never know for sure why he stayed longer. The Bible quotes Jesus, "This sickness is for the glory of God." It is hard not to have our way and in our time. It is hard to know God's love and to still accept the pain and to accept waiting.

Jesus came. Lazarus is dead and has been in the tomb for four days. Martha: you all know Martha – she has faith, she thinks sharp, she works hard. Martha runs to meet Jesus and starts interacting with him in a very intellectual discussion about death and resurrection. She is missing something. She is not hearing Jesus. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life."...

I am. It is present tense. It is now. Hope is not only for future. Hope is for the present. Life is for us know. Jesus presence is for us know. We are so dead. Dead in our own thinking, our own plans and ideas of how we can be living well. We are dead in our ways of false peacemaking, of pretending, of hypocrisy. Jesus says, "I am." Turn to me. Continue walking and looking at me. Stay with me. Do not give up, even if we have to wait and live through death, Jesus is with us. Psalm 23 words it so beautifully.

It did not work very well for Martha. Jesus does not seem to understand. Martha is upset. Lazarus is still dead. Jesus could change but he is not doing anything. What do smart and resourceful women do? They think of a better plan. How about if I send Mary? Maybe Jesus will listen to her?

Mary comes. The first thing she does is fall at his feet -- crying, weeping. Martha is too practical for such things. Martha is talking, arguing, and not displaying much emotion. Mary sobs. "If you had been there, my brother would not had died!"

Verse 33: "Jesus was deeply moved and his spirit troubled". John recorded Jesus feelings. It was obvious on his face. He shared it. Jesus had feelings and other saw it and knew. Feelings can help us to be open, vulnerable, and guide us to the right direction. Jesus was fully human as well as fully God. He saw all these people crying. He saw two sisters who were so crushed by the death of Lazarus, their brother.

It is OK to be sad. Maybe not all your life, but sadness is part of our feelings. We acknowledge them. We come with our sadness to the Lord. Read the Psalms. They are so full of emotions – all kinds of them. We love David. He comes as He is. He tells what he feels. I think this is the only way for us to be healed. We can feel joy if we let ourselves feel sadness.

Verse 35: "Jesus wept". It is the shortest verse in the Bible, but so important and so meaningful. Jesus, the all-powerful king of creation, should be tough. He should hold his sadness and not let emotions come out. Weak people cry.

All the people saw Him crying. They talked about him while he was crying: "See how much he loved him!"³⁷ But some of them said, "He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?" Jesus gives us an example of beauty, love and understanding by being compassionate. Things happen in this life – it hurts. People we love die, people we love get sick, get addicted, are betrayed, endure pain. We, ourselves, know what it is to be sad. Me too.

Because Jesus feels, because he loves, he comes in the midst of all and gives life. How fascinating! They all wanted Lazarus not to die but it was too late. Lazarus was dead and gone. Jesus arrives ready to visit Lazarus.

Jesus orders the tomb to be opened. Everyone starts thinking about the smell. The King James Bible uses a funny word. "Lord, by now he stinketh."

We worry about the smell, the smell of death. I think it is not Lazarus who stinks. Our stuffed emotions, our ignored feelings, our pretending faces. We all have and know things in our lives should be different but it is just too hard to admit or too painful to change.

I am not saying we should be rude or should hurt others, but we are called to be honest, true and free. A room might appear cleaner if we put our junk under the carpet, but the room is not clean. We have to be honest with ourselves first with what we feel. Come to God and ask, "Why do I feel this way? What is it in me that makes me to feel this way?"

I had feelings about the family who came late. I felt little compassion and a bit of anger. The Holy Spirit led me to acknowledged these emotions. Then Holy Spirit whispered what I should do. Yes, we all moved to the corner and let them to sit in our places. It felt good. I wish I always act like this, but we can learn. We can continue to ask for guidance for growth.

After Jesus wept, he was again deeply moved and it is then when he went to the tomb. Emotions can help us to do right things. Jesus went to the tomb, talked with his Father about what He is feeling, thanked God and said with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out"! The dead man came out.

I wish I would hear what Lazarus said. I wish I could know what Martha and Mary said. I am left with wonder. Three times this passage from John's Gospel describes how Jesus felt.

I am left with wonder if death, dead things, the stinking of my own thoughts and feelings can get out and have life.

What is dead in you? How are you dealing with your emotions? Do you know what you feel? What negative emotions do you feel? Which ones do you not let yourself feel? Are you hiding from them? Are you shoveling them aside or sweeping the under the carpet? We are gifted with feelings. They can help us to identify healing we need. They can move us to help others. They can help us to realize who we truly are.

Let's pray and come honestly with our feelings to the Lord and to His table. Let's believe so we can see the glory of God.