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May 19, 2019
JOHN 11:32-44
“Do Not Be Afraid to Take Off the Grave Clothes”

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

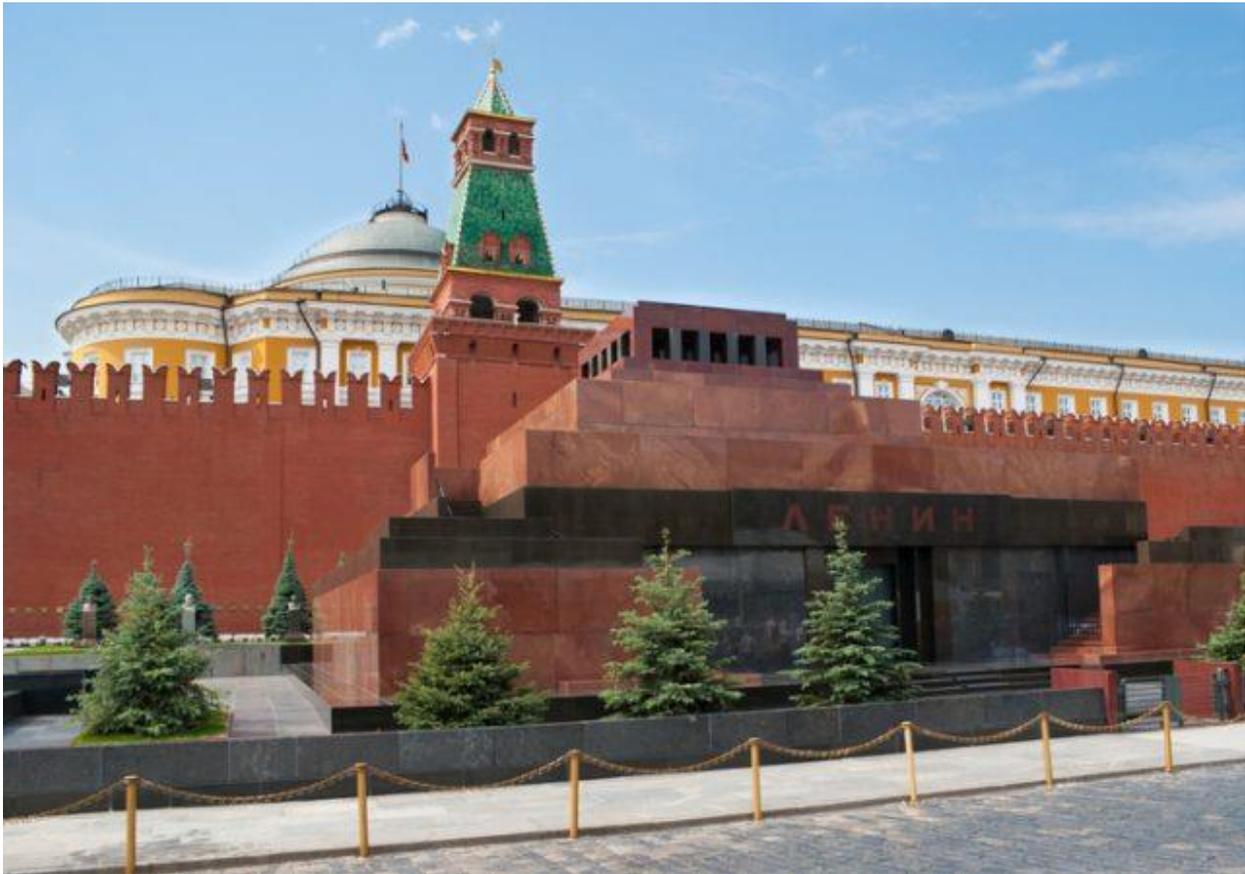
⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Thank you Tiffany, for your message last Sunday. It was so good to receive encouragement to be brave in answering and serving God. I think the UMW did a great job leading the worship.

When I was about 6 years old my family traveled to Russia. At Red Square in Moscow we visited the mausoleum of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov also known as Lenin. I do not remember much about it, but I do remember the cold and the long, long line as we waited to go in.



I wonder sometimes, why would you preserve a body? Even Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, wanted him to be buried, but sometimes you have no choice. He died 95 years ago in January 1924.

Russian scientists have developed embalming methods to maintain the look, feel and flexibility of the Soviet Union's founder's body. My father-in-law calls Lenin the world's largest and oldest pickle.

For thousands of years, humans have used embalming methods to preserve dead bodies. Nothing compares with Russia's efforts to preserve the Vladimir's body.

We only find two cases of embalming in the Bible.

When Jacob died, his son, Joseph, ordered the 40-day process of embalming before crossing the Sinai Desert with the body. When Joseph died, his body was embalmed and 400 years later the Israelites carried the coffin for 40 years in the wilderness.

Jesus' burial was more typical of Biblical times. In John 19 we read that Nicodemus helped Joseph of Arimathea take the body down from the cross. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes that weighed about 100 pounds.

In that hot climate you cannot delay. They would quickly wash the body and then bind the body with strips of linen to hold the mixture next to the body to cover the stench

of death. The arms would be wrapped down by the side of the body. The feet would be wrapped together and the ends sewn to keep it tight, and a cloth would be placed over the face. We might get the picture of a mummy.

Lazarus have been dead for four days. When Jesus finally arrived, people were still weeping and grieving. I imagine the loud cries. I can see people giving looks at Jesus. They asked, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Too often our thinking is very limited. Sure it sounded like a logical thought: Jesus could have come earlier and healed Lazarus. Who could have imagined that Lazarus would be raised from the dead?

Martha and Mary sent a messenger to Jesus. Jesus said, "Don't worry about him dying. It will bring glory to God and the Son of God will be glorified." Then Jesus waited two more days.

He finally told the disciples, "Lazarus has gone to sleep. It is time for me to wake him up."

In so many situations we think we have reached a dead end. The game is over. We have run out of time. What can I do now? There is no recourse. All hope is lost. Where is God when I need Him?

Jesus arrived and was moved. Jesus wept. His heart was broken for these people who lost Lazarus and their lack of faith. Had they forgotten about the daughter of the leader of the synagogue or the widow from Nain. Yes, we know today that Lazarus was raised, but stand with these people. Just imagine for a moment you have not heard nor read John 11.

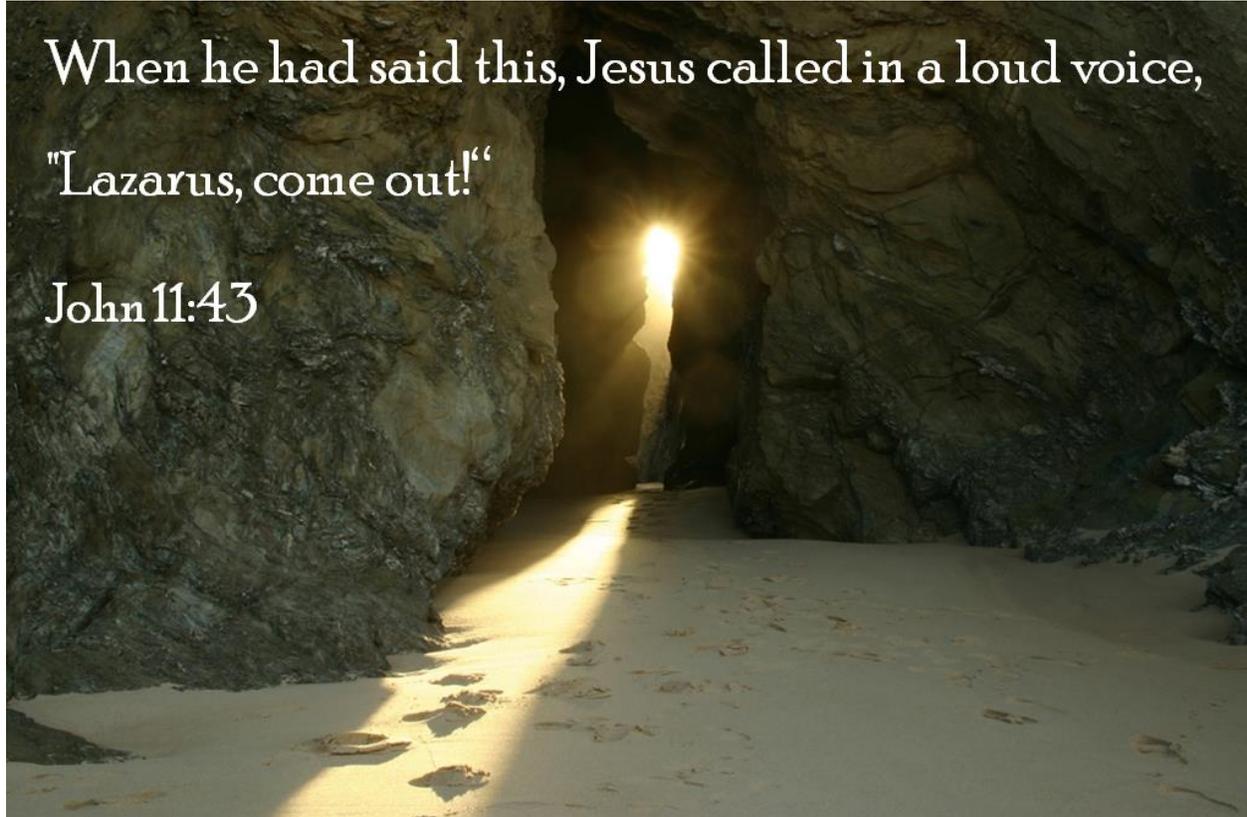
Jesus said, "Roll the stone away."

Martha, the more practical sister, objected. "What?!!! He has been dead for 4 days." The King James Bible uses a funny word. "By now he stinketh."

What would you be thinking as people were rolling the stone from the grave? Would you be bracing yourself for the terrible smell?

"Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!""

Loud voice. Why he was loud? To be louder than these wailing women? So



Lazarus can hear? For everyone in the crowd? It was the Word calling out! It was the same Word calling Lazarus out of the grave that called the worlds into being! It was the same Word calling Lazarus from death that called the dust of the earth to be formed into life, the Sun and the Moon to give off light, the seas to form and roll, the birds to exist and sing, and the stars to shine. When the Word calls out to the world He created, it cannot help but answer. The Word holds the light of life and the darkness of death cannot overcome it. As it was then, so it is now and shall ever be.

Some say, the Word of God is so powerful that if Jesus had not called Lazarus by name all the graves would have opened up and the bodies would have come out. Remember Ezekiel and them dry bones.

I do not know how many times you have heard this story, but let us never stop being amazed that Jesus spoke and in the process conquered death. Jesus' has power over sin and death merely by speaking.

I love the story of Lazarus. I could stop here and the Gospel will have been proclaimed. Lazarus was raised from the dead. Amen. Glory be to God in the Highest !

As Paul Harvey would have said, "And now for the rest of the story."

My mind and my heart have come to see the continuum of this narrative.

⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.” He must have looked like he was in a Halloween costume. His hands were tied to his side so he could not remove the cloth from his face. How did he shuffle out of the grave carrying 100 pounds of spices with his feet tied together?

I wonder what Lazarus thought. Was he surprised? I imagine him thinking, “I thought heaven will be different. Now look, all is just like life on earth. I thought it would be way different. I thought I would meet different people. Wow, who could of thought that heaven is just like earth. Well, at least Jesus is here.”

Do you think Lazarus was happy? Maybe he was tired of his sisters fighting and all the problems of life. Maybe he was overjoyed with seeing his dear friend Jesus.



This is what changed my thinking. Jesus said: **“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”**

According to most translations, Jesus said to them, “Untie (or unbind) him and let him go.” Lazarus needed the help of his friends to be released from the bondage of those stinky grave clothes. His hands were tied to his sides. He even needed help to take off the head covering so he could see Jesus. Are you and I helping people take off the old clothes of sin and self-destructive habits? What are we doing to help people see Jesus?

We celebrate baptism which is an outward sign of an inward work of God’s grace. Do we cross our arms and wait to see if they really have become new persons in Christ? Then, if they stumble, we say “I didn’t think he/she had really changed.” Are we investing ourselves in teaching, encouraging, and helping one another grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior? Jesus says untie them and let them go.

Jesus gave Lazarus new life, but he was still wrapped in dead man clothes.

Jesus did not want him just to exist. He wanted Lazarus to enjoy freedom and abundant life.

We have received life from Jesus, but we live wrapped in garments of death. I can see myself – often walking like a mummy -- alive but living like a dead person. Maybe Jesus was telling Lazarus, “You are truly alive. You do not have to live like a corpse bound and restrained from fully seeing and moving.”

One of the worst things we keep “wearing” are fear and anxiety. They are huge enemies of life. Fear keeps us in bondage. We are like Lazarus out of the grave. We are alive, but we barely can move because of threats – real or imagined. We have a hard time to even breathe because of fear. We are afraid of what is going to happen to us, to our money, to our business, to our kids. If that is not enough we are afraid of what is going to happen to our country or to the world. I can easily lose sleep just thinking about pollution.

Another garment of death we wear while we have life in Christ is fear of others. How many of us cannot make a change because we are afraid? What will others think? We allow the other person to tie us up in fear, bitterness and anger.

Maybe Lazarus wanted the security of staying in his smelly death clothes. How are you supposed to live after you have been raised? What kind of life is new life? His reputation is changed forever. How can anyone look at Lazarus without thinking about Jesus? You are “famous” and will always be carefully watched.

Think about it. Who put all these rags on him? Isn’t that true to us? We wear what others put on us.

The Bible says a lot about what kind of clothes we should wear:

1. Job said, “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; justice was my robe and turban.”

2. Isaiah said, "Put on the garment of praise."
3. Paul wrote, "Whoever is baptized is clothed in Jesus Christ"
4. He also wrote that, as God's people, we are to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.
5. In Revelation we learn that the saints in glory are wearing spotless garments.

*Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing pow'r?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
When the Bridegroom cometh will your robes be white!
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin,
And be washed in the blood of the Lamb.*

Being a faithful and true disciple is scary. Fear whispers "You will not be happy. Do not give all your time. Do not tithe generously. You will lose. You will not have enough for yourself. You will not have any fun." Fear of losing is huge. Fear of rejection can keep us dead even if we have been granted a new life.

When we decided to move to the U.S. I had a fear. Half of me was saying, "You cannot do it. How many times have you preached in English? How much have you worked in the U.S? You cannot do it. Stay where you are. At least you know what you are facing here and you know how to survive. You do not know what is waiting for in America. Nobody is waiting for you with open arms there. You have no resources. You have no clue how hard it is truly to live in another culture."

There is a saying, "Better a devil you know than a devil you do not know."

I decided to ask for a part time job. I will just stay quietly at home. I will help the kids, clean house and be a good mom and wife.

We met with our bishop in Europe. When I said I would like to be a part time pastor, he looked straight into my eyes and told me: "That would be the biggest mistake. It will be a loss to you, to the church and to the kingdom of God." I will always be grateful for these words. I was afraid. My fear almost took me from what I am called to do, from my passion and from what makes me alive. Fear almost robbed me.

John 8:36: "So if the Son sets you free, **you will be free indeed!**"

I knew deep in my heart that God is already ahead of me. The words that keep ringing in my ears are: "I am with you. All the time. If you believe this, then what are you afraid of?"

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt 28:20b)

Lenin's body has been well taken care of for over 95 years. What they cannot do is bring him back to life. Scientists get better and better at keeping you young or on life support, but who can give to you Life in your life? Who can take all your fears? Who can take off the sin-stained garments of death? Who can free you from sin? Who can give eternal life? Who can satisfy your deepest desires? Have faith and courage in God. DO NOT BE AFRAID. **“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (2Tim 1:7)**



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