

**3.26.23 – Lent 5**  
**“Disappointment Turns to Wonder”**

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Psalm 130 (NIV)**

*A song of ascents.*

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.

<sup>3</sup> If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

<sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.

<sup>6</sup> I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

<sup>7</sup> Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.

<sup>8</sup> He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins.

**Leader: These are Hopeful Words of God.** All: Thanks be to God!

**John 11:1-27 (NLT)**

*The Raising of Lazarus*

<sup>1</sup> A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. <sup>2</sup> This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. <sup>3</sup> So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." <sup>5</sup> So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup> he stayed where he was for the next two days. <sup>7</sup> Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

<sup>8</sup> But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?"

<sup>9</sup> Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world.

<sup>10</sup> But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light." <sup>11</sup> Then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up."

<sup>12</sup> The disciples said, “Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!” <sup>13</sup> They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died.

<sup>14</sup> So he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> And for your sakes, I’m glad I wasn’t there, for now you will really believe. Come, let’s go see him.”

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let’s go, too—and die with Jesus.”

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. <sup>20</sup> When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup> “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?”

<sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.”

**Leader: These Words of Jesus Are Reassuring.** All: Thanks be to God!

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, be present to us now as we study the Scriptures that are both difficult yet reassuring. In this last week of Lent, may we be diligent to spend time with you in prayer and study following your footsteps toward the cross and the tomb. Reveal today the messages you have for each of us in these words, so that we may face disappointments with courage as you turn them into wonder and encouragement. Let your voice be the one heard today as you speak through mine. Amen.

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How many of us turn to the Psalms when we are in a difficult place? I certainly do, partly for the poetry which soothes any anxiety, and partly for the strong, encouraging words of the poet who had overcome some challenging situation in life. This week at Sue Korcel’s Celebration of Life service, we recited together the Twenty-third Psalm, so familiar at funerals to comfort and reassure attendees. The writer of Psalm 130 seeks the Lord’s mercy from some anguish he never reveals, but one which must be very grim, based on the language he uses like “out of the depths.”

It may refer to the threat of death, so the writer tries to assuage himself of any sin-guilt. This psalm is called a Song of Ascents, which refers to the Judaic custom of climbing the hills toward Jerusalem for festivals and feast days; it is a song of preparation before arriving at the temple. As you have heard me describe, even with paved roads in our current time, there are many steep inclines or ascending hills to walk up all around Israel before getting to any of the temples.

The practice of purifying oneself did not just refer to physical cleanliness; that is why before high holy days, fasting and confession were expected for spiritual purification. In this psalm, the poet does **not** clearly lay out his sin or the anguished guilt he feels, yet trusts God to know it and not keep a record of it once Yahweh forgives the sinner. Through the rebellion of sin, humans distance themselves from God and his laws, yet God still forgives. We Christian believers also sin intentionally or unintentionally, and this Lenten season is a time for repentance and forgiveness. The writer believes deeply that despite his sin, God's loyalty to the people of Israel would redeem the nation and her people. The writer is willing to wait on this Lord of hope and love. Do we seek his forgiveness and wait on his return year-round or just during Lent? Isn't Jesus our redemption? Perhaps the waiting was also for the Messiah, whose birth we celebrated in December and whose resurrection we are about to celebrate in two weeks.

The second passage is a familiar one and deals also with death, but not really sin, only doubt and disappointment, which Jesus turns all around to demonstrate God's glorious power and love. The story is noted in detail here in John and briefly in Luke 7. Jesus has been travelling from

Galilee south toward Jerusalem and receives news of Lazarus when he is in Perea (south of Galilee if you follow the Jordan). The time Jesus was in Perea was also a time of miracles and ministry. If you look on a map, you can see it is the land on the eastern side of the Jordan River and a third of the way south toward the Dead Sea. The crowds are starting to get restless and doubtful, and threatened in Chapter 10 to stone Jesus. Perea is where Jesus got the news his friend had become ill and died. He got away from the protesters but did not get to Bethany for four days.

The disciples were not too happy Jesus was heading south again toward Judea because the Pharisees and government were already watching him. Bethany was only two miles south of Jerusalem, so based on the geography, it would take Jesus time to walk or ride from Perea to Bethany. Martha and Mary were good family friends of Jesus, so they were upset with the delay. The sisters assumed because of Jesus' love for Lazarus that he would come quickly and heal their brother of the sickness. Jesus knew that this illness was not permanent, and that God's plan was to show his glory. *Do you hear this word, church?!* Yes we become disappointed that not everyone gets healed, but we can take hope from this understanding.

His friend Lazarus had "fallen asleep" (**dead** for all intents and purposes), but his disciples thought he was physically sleeping and would get better, so rushing was not necessary. They did not yet comprehend the Messiah's teaching about eternal life through spiritual rebirth and salvation would prevent absolute death. Remember that any death had to be attended to quickly, so Mary and Martha had anointed the body, wrapping him (as in the bulletin photo), and placing him in a crypt or

cave. Also, remember that in Palestine, it was hot and dry; a dead body would decompose quickly, so it was custom to bury within the same day a person died. Burials were always done outside the city in keeping with Levitical laws, even in Jesus' day, yet they were close enough to Jerusalem that many Jews who were in the area came to console Mary and Martha. These Jews would witness the miracle of Jesus' waking him up! This is after today's passage, so please re-read the whole Chapter 11.

After Jesus arrived at their home, the more aggressive Mary came out to meet him and chastised him for being too late. He reassured her that her brother would rise again, and Martha confirmed that he would rise again when all were resurrected as Jesus had instructed. But Jesus had a more profound message for her that he was not just her friend, but "the Resurrection and the Life"! And he confronted her: "<sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?" <sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God." Her disappointment soon became wonder as she acknowledged Christ as her Savior even though she did not quite know what that would mean in the next few weeks.

So, like the marginalized blind man given the gift of sight from last week, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were given another chance at life both physically and spiritually. As are we, when we repent, seek forgiveness, and live our lives in relationship with Christ. It is **not** about striving for goodness or perfection, but rather our faith is about surrendering to the power of the Holy Spirit in everything we say and do. **A life restored is a life transformed.** Has your life been restored in Jesus? Are you living out

the transformative elements in your daily life? Have you truly surrendered to his call and the hope of resurrection? I have and hope you have too. As we approach Easter, please keep looking for those miracles of transformation, and share them. Amen. ||

**Will you pray with me?** Miraculous healing Lord, you amaze us with your power, patience, and grace. Help us to become more aware of you and your miracles in this world of calamity and sin. We ask for the discipline to study your Scriptures, and insight to understand. We feel your presence in our church, mission center, and community, so help us see opportunities to share your healing and miraculous life-giving salvation with others. In Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen.**