

Today is All Saints Sunday.

I am not sure if I had even heard of this day until I joined the ELCA in 1999 when I was 27 years old.

This day is quiet and normally plain and simple to the outside world. Those outside of the church walls know about the other days that we celebrate; especially Christmas and Easter but All Saints sneak onto our calendar at the end of the Christian calendar. The Christian calendar year is almost over.

We are in Year B and we turn to Year C on November 28<sup>th</sup> with Advent I.

Before we jump into the text, I will give you an oh so brief history about All Saints. The exact timing of the day is a little tough to pin down, but it occurred in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the date originally was on May 13<sup>th</sup>. Many believe it was set on that day to contrast the Pagan Celebrations that were occurring.

In the 600's, there were so many Christian martyr's that the church set aside one day to recognize all the saints. Then, Pope Gregory III moved the tradition of celebrating All Saints' Day on November 1 every year when he was in office from 731 to 741 AD.

Now, we as churches, use the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of November to recognize and celebrate the day.

Now, let us step into the text; specifically, the Gospel text and see how it ties in with All Saints and how we can engage with it.

The story of Lazarus is one of those stories that I do not see the same way. My view has changed over the decades. Back in the day, I saw this story as a family crisis that was occurring in the town on Bethany **and** Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

Fred Caddock is the individual that shifted my thoughts. He was a saint who passed away on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015. His style of preaching has influenced thousand of pastors and how they preach. The insight that he brought to me was the following:

The story of Lazarus is **not** about a family crisis in Bethany as much as it is about the crisis of the world caught in death and sin. It's **not** so much about resuscitating a corpse as it is about giving life to the world.

I find it enlightening to listen into words and views that maybe you are not always accustomed to listening to. Maybe your views won't change, but maybe they will. I know that my views on many issues have changed over the years.

That was also part of our discussion at the Book Club on Monday. We may not fully agree with Elle's conclusion but seeing issues from a different perspective can be eye opening. In chapter one, our eyes were open to the story of Jesus death. If you want to join us, we have seven more Monday's.

Now that I have given an announcement within my sermon, lets jump back to the text and let me share what else has changed for me over the years.

I have always seen this chapter in John as "*The Raising of Lazarus*" chapter. This comes from my original view that this story is about his raising and many bibles put chapter headings in and that is what they have labeled it.

However, Dr Jamie Clark-Soles who is a Teaching Professor at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University opened my eyes to another view. Maybe, we should be seeing this text as "*The Confessions of Martha, with the help of Mary*"

So, maybe we can look at this story through their eyes and their words. I mean, we place the focus on Lazarus and he does not even speak in this text.

When you look at this text, I believe that our English language and the translators do injustice to it. When you look at the Greek words that are used, the wording is a little different. The difference in the words makes a contrast in the words that Mary use and the body language that she is expressing.

Kneeling at the feet of Jesus, which is what we see and hear in most translations, does show the full extent of her actions. The Greek word used really paints more of a picture of her falling onto the feet of Jesus with heavy force and grasping the feet. It's not in a dignified manner that we see when the magi kneeled down beside him in the Christmas story.

Then, listen to their words; they both said it to him:

*Lord, if only ....*

Both of them wanted Jesus to know that **if only** you were here, our brother would still be alive. Jesus, why were you not here for us?

There is so much that we could do with his text and the conversation and reaction to all the players in the story. Once again, I have had a shift on my focus.

In the past, I use to lean into either the shortest passage of the Bible, "*Jesus Wept.*" The confirmation students then got excited because they went, "*yes, I can memorize that scripture*" and that is the scripture that they would use for the verse they had to memorize to meet a confirmation requirement. **OR, I** focused on the emotion of anger that Jesus had and where that anger rested.

However, let me share with you where I am sitting today with this passage. Here is the verse that stood out to me:

Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him loose."

Jesus certainly had the power with him to raise him and have Lazarus come out of the tomb fully unwrapped but that is not what happened. Lazarus stepped out completely bound.

Why?

Jesus calls to the **community** to unbind the man who had been held captive by the unpleasant stench of death.

Jesus started the process but the **community** was enjoined to participate in the unbinding of Lazarus and they were the ones to restore him to life.

Today is ALL SAINT SUNDAY. Today, we recognize the saints who have gone on before us. We have fourteen saints connected to our community who have experienced physical death this past year. We have many others who have died that are connected deeply through the members of our church.

Just as Mary was distraught; rightfully so; we have been distraught. We desperately mourned the deaths of those close to us. However, we can hold on to the reminder that Jesus gave to Mary. The reminder is that the physical death is not the end.

There will be a final resurrection for all of us.

I may have not done a great job on the display in front of me. But, I want to have a visual reminder for the fourteen saints who have gone on before us. I also wanted to give you a moment to hold onto the void that you have in your heart from a loved one and light a candle.

Most of us in the U.S. do not do a great job of mourning and celebrating death. If we were in Mexico, we would have the opportunity through "The Day of the Dead" and if we were in Haiti; the Festival Day of the Dead.

They use it as a time for respect, honor, and story sharing.

I want to encourage you to take time today and respect and honor those saints who have gone on before us and if you can; listen into a story about their lives. There is so much that we can learn.

As I conclude today, I want to circle back to the story of Lazarus and the words of Jesus when he said, “unbind him”.

The community listened in and took the cloths off of him and set him free.

We are closing in on the end of the year and we will be beginning a new year. It has been a long 3 years for many of you in the pews. It is my hope and my prayer that we as a community can rally around each other.

From a church standpoint, there are going to be a lot of voids as we begin 2022.

Maybe God is poking you to get involved in a specific area.

Maybe God is whispering in your ear that you need to say NO to a few things so you can say YES to another thing.

Whatever, the case may be, may we remember that this race of life is not about individual living. It is about living in community and being here for one another.

On this day especially, may we look into the empty tomb of Lazarus and see that it is empty and prefigures Jesus own empty tomb. With that empty tomb, we have the promise of a resurrection life.  
**AMEN.**