

**5 Lent
March 29, 2020**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.
AMEN**

Sermon by The Rev. Deena M. Galantowicz

Today's Gospel message reminds me of a certain place. It is in Tipperary in Ireland. There is a massive island of rock. On it stands the ruins of a cathedral, a monastery, and a round tower. Obviously ancient. It looms over the town beneath it, and the green countryside stretching far away from it. It is called The Rock of Cashel. For me, to view the Rock of Cashel evokes a sense of awe, of wonder, of sort of asking...What's it all about, Alfie?? What's it all about?

And so, for me, today's Gospel is such an experience. It looms over the countryside of the gospel...mysterious, majestic, challenging, and, perhaps most important of all, resistant to any efforts at explanation or analysis. The story itself conveys its own power. So let's us go back together to that home of Mary and Martha, and yes, Lazarus.

To our knowledge there was only one place where Jesus was totally relaxed and at home. It was a house east of Jerusalem, near the slope of the Mount of Olives. Three people lived there...two sisters and a brother. We have some knowledge of the two sisters, but nothing about the brother. Martha has been portrayed as caring, extrovert, practical. Mary is portrayed as very different...reflective, quiet, perhaps timid. And...Lazarus...well he is something of a mystery personality for us. At any rate THIS was the home, the haven for Jesus.

So, for him, for Jesus, the news of the death of Lazarus could not have come at a worse time. Jesus was out of the city. He had been warned to keep a low profile for a while, to stay out of danger. And then the news reaches him that his friend, Lazarus, is dead. ///// There was no choice. Jesus had to go to his friends' home. We can perceive a measure of the danger in the frightened remark of one of the followers of Jesus. "Let US also go that we may die with him." And, by the way, this is said by Thomas.....You know...doubting Thomas. Just think of that. Hearing that Jesus was going to go where he might be sought out and killed/his life ended, this follower of Jesus said..."Well then let us also go that we may die with him."

They arrived at the house to be met by a very angry Martha who blurted out "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." Jesus asks where Lazarus has been placed and the crowd which has gathered around Jesus follows him to the tomb. Jesus is under great emotional stress. Twice in the Gospel of John we have this picture. But we also have a hint of something larger and more mysterious when the Gospel says that ..."Jesus, greatly disturbed, came to the tomb."

The atmosphere is tense. The words of Jesus are terse and few. He says, "Take away the stone." A sense of fear and distress probably rippled thru' the group. And, with typical bluntness, Martha

warns him of what he already knows. The presence of death will be real. But, in the reply of Jesus there is a strange, and distancing authority. He says, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" //////////////

In this fearful moment, Jesus gathers his breath and shouts, "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus uses the simplest of language, all the more powerful for its simplicity. The Gospel says, "The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.

In the crowd no one moved, no one spoke. The voice of Jesus broke the stillness...the silence...with a simple caring direction. "Unbind him, and let him go."////////

I cannot presume to explain this story. My instinct is to internalize it. And I have been. Think about it. In what sense does our Lord come to the dead areas of our lives and call us to come out? In THIS SENSE we are all Lazarus!! We are all Lazarus with dead/dormant parts of ourselves even as we seem to be alive! What is it that binds us/shrouds us? What secrets choke us? What fear do we carry and protect even, so that no living person can know the fullness of who we are? What is the nature of the tomb that a part of our very self is in? Does anyone realize there is something buried?////////

In this quite surreal time in our lives, let us each hear Jesus say "My dearly beloved...come out...out from your hiddenness...out from your scars of the past. May each of us hear his gentle entreaty, saying to us, "Come Out." You are my beloved. Do not continue to be bound by death dealing forces and memories and fractures from the past. Shake off your bondage! Be Free! I love you! Come...follow me.

AMEN