

During this season of Lent, our sermon series has focused on different types of wounds, in which Jesus heals. When Jesus heals our wounds, we receive a new life. Jesus gave Nicodemus new life when he overcame his unbelief. The woman at the well received living water, and she was welcomed back into her community. The man born blind received the light of life both physical and spiritual. Today, Lazarus receives a resurrected life as do his sisters who are in the throes of grief. Jesus has life-giving power to give all of us new life. Even in our current experiences of loss and grief, Christ resurrects us and gives us a future.

The scripture I just read is only a portion of the Lazarus story. If you are not familiar with the whole story, here's a brief summary. Lazarus, Mary, & Martha are siblings and close friends with Jesus. Lazarus becomes ill, but Jesus is away. The sisters send a message to Jesus to tell him that Lazarus is sick. After receiving the message, Jesus stays two days before he goes to them.

That is an interesting detail because if we hear that a friend or loved one is deathly ill, we probably wouldn't wait two days before we go to them. Unless we're in quarantine and told that we can't or shouldn't go. Whatever Jesus was doing, John did not feel that it was important enough to mention it in the story.

We don't really know why he waited two days, but we can speculate. Jesus says that this illness would not end in death and that it will glorify God (v.4). Since Jesus knows the big picture, he doesn't rush to act like the sisters want him to. Perhaps he waits for God's timing. Lazarus is supposed to be dead for four days before he is

resurrected, so Jesus is allowing the time and space for God to work.

We also learn from the preceding scripture that Jesus is near the Jordan because he narrowly escaped being stoned by the Jews in Jerusalem. Perhaps he was waiting for some time to pass, to allow the anger and uprising to simmer a bit. However, he doesn't let that stop him from going to his friends at just the right time.

When Jesus arrives, the sisters think it is too late. They feel disappointed and probably betrayed that Jesus would not come to them in their time of need. They had witnessed his miracles and healing of others, so where was he when they needed him? Martha and Mary talk to Jesus separately, yet they both say the same thing: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v.21, 32).

So many times in our grief, we feel that Jesus is not with us. That if Jesus had only been there, answering our prayers or showing mercy, that he could have prevented the loss. The sisters probably wanted to ask, Why did you wait two days? Don't we mean more to you than that? We probably want to ask, why do we have to wait two months? Our lives just hang in the balance. Others who have been grieving long before this pandemic are probably asking, Why do we have to wait two years, or two decades, before we find a new life? Why do we have to wait?

Perhaps Jesus waits two days to give them space to grieve their loss. In order for them to make their grief meaningful, they need time to sit in their grief and process just how much they lost. Perhaps Jesus gives others the opportunity to grieve with them. There are people there consoling the

sisters. The whole community is grieving the loss of Lazarus.

Including Jesus. As the sisters and others weep, Jesus weeps too. He is “greatly disturbed” and “deeply moved” (v.33) by their grief and his own grief. He joins in their suffering, and he is moved to act. He doesn’t allow the sisters’ grief or the collective grief to keep them separated from God. He doesn’t allow his own grief to block the promise of hope that lies in the tomb.

Jesus goes to his friend’s tomb and calls him out by name. Augustine, an early Christian theologian said, “Jesus had to call out Lazarus by name for if he hadn’t, all the dead would have come out of their graves!” God’s gift of new life is for all of us, and Jesus has the power to give it to all of us.

We are all grieving our losses right now...the loss of our jobs, a paycheck, the downward turn of the economy, or our financial outlook. We share a collective grief in losing the normalcy of our lives. We miss our friends at school or sharing a laugh with our coworkers. We miss our freedom of getting out and experiencing the world. We’re sad our plans of trips, weddings, and birthday parties had to be cancelled, and we’re anxious because we don’t know when or if they will ever be rescheduled. We grieve our feeling of powerlessness and aren’t really sure what the future will look like after this. We will know people who will get sick – if not already – and people who will die.

We may not be able to envision what life will look like after this, whether or not there will be permanent change, but God knows our future holds something good. Even if we don’t know what it is, trust that God knows. Wendell Berry wrote in his

book *Jayber Crow*: “I don't believe that grief passes away. It has its time and place forever. More time is added to it; it becomes a story within a story. But grief and griever alike endure.” We endure because of the promise of new life in Christ.

Christ waits in the empty space we make for him. Whether it is two days, two months, or what seems like two lifetimes, we make space for Jesus to come to us and call us out of our grief. We are entombed by our grief, yet Lazarus shows us that we can walk out with Christ. We are unbound by our ties of loss, and we walk into our future with hope and new life. Amen.