

## Reversal

### John 11: 1-45

I had thought about changing our text at the beginning of the week because it didn't seem to speak to where we are as a community of faith, that is until I noticed Martha's words, words which are later repeated by Mary..."Lord, if you had only been here, my brother would not have died.

These words have stayed with me all week because in them, I hear echoes of conversations which I have had over the years with congregational members when they have experienced unimaginable loss in their lives. I hear echoes of the conversations which I have had with myself, saying if only I had done this, then that would not have happened. In Martha and Mary's words, I hear echoes of the conversations which I have had, which others have had with God, saying, God if you had been the God you are supposed to be, then this, this loss, this death, this grief, this thing which has shaken me to my core, would never have happened.

Mary and Martha's words have resonated with me this week as I have had conversations with colleagues, with congregational members, with family and friends as we try to rationalize something which is out of our control, a feeling which becomes more and more real with each passing day during this time of uncertainty.

It is a scary feeling, not being able to control all the details, not being able to know what's coming up in the next minute, in the next hour, in the next day. I was talking with a colleague the other day and she shared that the hard lesson she is having to re-learn every single day is that she cannot control the outcome, that she can only control her reaction to the outcome, a lesson which I too am struggling to remember with each passing day.

So much so that I realized that I was only focusing on Mary and Martha's words in our text. And by doing so, I was missing Jesus' response. I was ignoring the sign of life restored. Like Mary and Marth, I was so focused on what I couldn't control in this story that I missed the sign which "restores our capacity to see God in the midst of disaster".

Because very much like Mary and Martha, I got caught up in the details and I missed the big picture. This is what happens in our text when Martha approaches Jesus and says what she does. Jesus responds to her statement by telling her that her brother will rise again. Martha misunderstands him. She thinks that Jesus is talking about some future event. When in reality, Jesus is talking about the present.

Jesus tries to get Martha to understand what he means by expanding on his statement. He tells her that "I am the resurrection and the life". Jesus wants her to know that being a believer is not only about some future event. It is also about the

here and now. It is about being an active participant in the Kingdom of God which is present in our midst right now. It is about the abundant new life in Jesus offered to us as people of faith. It is about our connection to the presence of God, a connection which changes our focus, a connection which reframes our narrative, a connection which invites us into a new way of being, a way which is not about control but rather about trust and hope because we already know how the story will end. We know that love and light will have the last word. We know that the darkness will not overcome the light. We know that new life abounds for all of God's people.

Or as one commentator put it: "This is not a text which pronounces survival practices for us as people of faith. Nor is it a flippant everything is going to be okay type of text either. Rather the raising of Lazarus is a sign of God's faithfulness. It is a sign of life restored in a world permeated with death and despair."

As people of faith, we have never been promised that bad things would not happen to us or around us. What we have been promised by a Savior who overcame the grave is that we would never be alone in the midst of our disappointments and despairs.

You see, unfortunately, we who believe have come to buy into the false narrative that God is there to serve only our wants. And when these wants are not met, it is all God's fault. But this is not how being in relationship with God works. That's not how any of this works.

Yes, God invites us to bring all our fears, all our worries, all our joys, all our sorrows to God, and yes, we can even call out God when we don't think God is acting in a manner which reflects the character of God we know to be true. But this does not mean God is here to be at our beck and call. And this also means that we might not like the answer God gives us when we ask the difficult questions. Just look at Job. He calls God out and God responds with, "I am God and you are not". I cannot tell you how many times I have been and continue to be grateful for that answer because if I was God, we really would be in trouble.

In the end, faith has never been about yours or my wants. Rather, faith has always been about changing our focus from what we cannot control to experiencing the presence of God in the world, a presence which is all around us, a presence which will never leave us to go through our trials and tribulations all alone.

What the author of John wants us to understand is that the raising of Lazarus reframes, re-verses, re-tells Mary and Martha's story, shifting their focus from

death and despair to the promise of God's Spirit moving in and among them, a Spirit which brings forth healing and wholeness for all of God's people. In fact, the whole Gospel narrative reframes our stories of disaster and disappointment into promises of new life which are all around us if we simply open our eyes, open our minds, open our hearts to the presence of God in our midst.

For us as people of faith, the raising of Lazarus gives us a glimpse of what is real for us...a promise that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and that those who believe, even though they will die, they will live.....all because we have reframed our narrative, this time shifting our focus from things we cannot control to things like the grace and love of God which strengthen us and encourages us as we make our way through life. We have reframed our narrative, this time shifting our stories from despair and disappointment to stories of abundant life. As disciples of Christ, we are invited to reframe, to re-verse, to re-tell our story, this time grounded in our connection to the presence of God, which is always moving in and among us, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

I said this last week and I'll say it again this week... I don't pretend to have all the answers during this time of uncertainty. But one thing that I know to be True is this...as disciples of Christ, we serve a God who overcame the grave and brought forth new life for all of God's people. We worship a God that when the world said death and darkness had won, showed us that love will always reverse

the story. As people of faith, we are named and claimed by a God who will make a way out of no way, reminding us that fear and worry will never be the last word.

So as we continue our Lenten walk, and as we continue to make our way through this unknown reality, it is my hope and prayer that we open our hearts, open our minds, open our eyes to see God, to experience God's faithfulness in the midst of disaster because each time we do, it is an opportunity to re-verse the stories of disappointment and despair which fill our world right now and invite them to become stories of abundant life, showing everyone that God is still at work in this world, bringing healing and wholeness, not only for God's people but for all of God's creation as well. Thanks be to God. Amen.