

*Come and See: Asking Jesus in John, Pt. 5*  
***Lord, Come and See!***  
*John 11: 28-44*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

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Jesus remains just outside the village of Bethany. He asks Martha to send for her sister Mary. So Mary rises from the group of mourners at her house and goes to Jesus. Mary says exactly the same thing Martha had said to him. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” But the tone and result of the encounter is very different. We’re told that Mary falls at Jesus’ feet. She does not look Jesus in the eye and tell him how he could have prevented her brother’s death. She falls before him. So many emotions could be represented. Utterly overwhelmed by Lazarus’ death, Mary just gives all of it to Jesus. She releases her bewilderment and her pain. “You are my Lord. You could have prevented this. You didn’t. I don’t know how to cope. But I trust you. I beg you to do something. Help me.” Mary is all heart and she pours that heart out at the feet of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

When Martha said, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died,” Jesus replied with a theological assurance. “Your brother will rise again.” He engaged Martha about the future resurrection of the dead, and astounded her with the news that he, himself, *is* resurrection and life. Jesus answered Martha with confidence and hope. He knew what was going to happen.



But with Mary, Jesus grows troubled. The words used there signal deep, rolling, explosive emotion. One scholar translates, “He was outraged in his spirit and troubled in himself.” So not just sadness. But anger. The profound feeling, “This is not right! All this dying should not be! Humans were not made to break and crack from all these leave- takings. My Father made them for communion. This heart-rending is plain wrong.”

So Jesus asks them a simple question, “Where have you laid him?” And the people reply, “Lord, come and see.” Now a little ding should be going off in our brains. “Come and see.” Haven’t I heard that before? And not just because it’s the title of our Lent study! Way back in John 1, the first disciples asked Jesus, “Where are you staying?” And he replied “Come and see.” The eternal Son of God took up a real humanity. He invited his new disciples to come and see his bedroll and his campfire. Come and see how it is with the Son of God living in the world. Now, the conversation flips. We ordinary humans invite Jesus the Son of God to come and see. There’s something child like in this. The way a little guy will cut his finger and run show it to his mother. “Mama, look what happened. I’ll feel better if you see it. This hurts and I don’t know what to do, but you will.” So here. “Jesus, come and see how it is with us. Come and see where our loved ones go. See how we put bodies in caves, and never hear their voices again. Never see their faces. This hurts and we don’t know what to do. Come and see.”

This child like, sad, eager request moves Jesus again. Here we get the shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus wept. He cries over the heart break of our life in the world that always ends in partings. He cries in sorrow. He cries in anger. He cries in sympathy. What people on earth have a God like ours? A God comes to live among us so truly that his heart breaks for our misery! What people have ever lived who have a God so tender, so involved, so invested as ours?

The great London pastor Charles Spurgeon preached on this verse. Spurgeon wields language with such power that I just have to quote him for you:

The Saviour’s heart was made to hold sorrow...more, his heart was made capacious enough to be a reservoir wherein should be gathered up great floods of grief. See [here] how the sorrow bursts forth in a mighty flood! Mark the record of that flood in these amazing words, “Jesus wept.”

He was love, and only love; and through his love he descended into the depths of grief with the beloved ones whose lot was sorrowful; and he carried out to the full that sacred precept, “Weep with them that weep.” Jesus was no unsuffering [angelic being]... but he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and therefore “Jesus wept.”

He could not stand in the front of a lone grave, about to look upon a single corpse, without weeping. He saw in that one death the representation of what sin has done on so enormous a scale, that it is impossible to compute the devastation; and therefore he wept. What hast thou not done, O Sin! Thou

hast slain all these, O Death! What a field of blood has Satan made this earth! The Saviour could not stand unmoved in the presence of the Destroyer, nor approach the gate of death's palace without deep emotion. Of this he was by no means ashamed; and therefore he did not hold back his tears: "Jesus wept."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus saw where all our enthronement of ourselves leads. He saw how the evil one deceives us and enslaves us. He saw the ruination of his Father's good creation. He saw the rot of death that begins as soon as we are conceived. Seeing such ruin from within our world, from within our very humanity, he could not stand for it to be so. Eagerly we urged him to come and see. Jesus wept with sorrow and outrage as he went. This death, no death, could be permitted to stand.



So they take Jesus to the cave in which Lazarus' body lay. A great stone was over the opening. Jesus, still deeply moved, spoiling to confront death head on, commands them to take away the stone. We can only imagine the shock of this. Take the dirt off this grave. Haul up the casket. Exhume the body! The offense of his actions, should Jesus, fail, would have been complete. This is outrageous, disrespectful, shocking behavior—unless he can actually raise the dead.

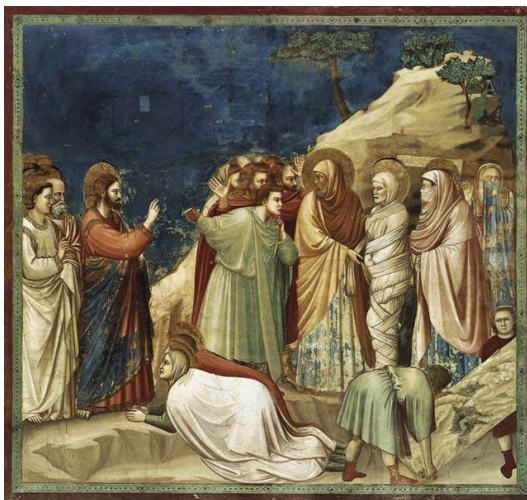
Martha, the practical one, reminds Jesus that Lazarus has been dead four days. He is seriously, completely dead. I love how the King James says it, "Lord, by now he stinketh!" To put it mildly. A dead mouse in the attic stinketh. A human corpse four days in a cave reeks nauseatingly. Nevertheless, they open the cave. Jesus pauses to pray aloud. He lets the stink roll out of the cave. He lets the darkness of the open tomb gape out. He lets all the tension of this shocking act just hang there while he gives thanks to his Father. He does not ask his Father for anything. He has already done that. He already knows what the Father has decreed and what the Spirit will do through Jesus. He just wants people to hear his confident gratitude. His warrior thanksgiving. He is on the Father's mission and acts in the power of the Father by the Spirit he has been given.



Then, only then, does Jesus cry out with a loud voice. “Lazarus, come out!” Don’t stay dead. Come back to us now. Leave that cave. Get out of death. Come out. Now!<sup>3</sup>

I love thinking about how this moment fulfilled the ancient prophecy of the LORD’s special servant, the Messiah. In Isaiah 49, the LORD I AM speaks to his Christ of all he would do as “as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (49: 6). The Messiah’s redeeming work would include “saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’” (Is. 49:7). Surely this prophecy rang in Jesus’ mind as he raised Lazarus. He literally calls a man out of the prison and darkness of death.

What’s more, Jesus’ loud summons of Lazarus reminds us of how Paul described the future resurrection of all believers, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command...And the dead in Christ will rise first” (I Thes. 4: 16). Jesus’ voice penetrates the realm of death and recalls a spirit to its body. He will do so again when he returns, raising all those who have died. How mighty is our weeping Savior!



Let’s turn this one more way as the story concludes. I love the way Giotto painted this scene way back in 1306. Giotto followed the traditional way the ancient icons showed the raising of Lazarus, but he breathed new life into it. He’s particularly graphic with Lazarus. We see him bound tightly with the strips of cloth. There’s almost a comic element in this resurrection. Could not Jesus who raised the dead have also freed Lazarus of his graveclothes? We have to imagine the newly alive again

Lazarus fairly hopping out of the cave covered head to toe in bandages. By this we know this was no trick. Lazarus had really been dead. Now he lives. So Jesus says to the bystanders, “Unbind him, and let him go.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus asks for their participation. Of course he could have blown open the cave with a word. But he wanted them to remove the stone. Of course he could

have shredded the graveclothes. But he wanted others to set Lazarus free. The Son of God came to us as a man in order to participate in all we undergo. He answered the cry to “Come and see.” He felt the passion and pain of life in the world. And the Son of God came to us as a man in order to invite us to participate with him in the work of redeeming the world. Jesus wants his disciples to be in on the mission of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit of making all things new.

So here is the missional aspect of this story. We have a part to play. Think of how these phrases work in our daily lives. *Take away the stone. Unbind that man. Let him go.* For surely can put up barriers to keep people locked in death. We surely can keep people tied in knots. We surely can stifle people from the freedom of the gospel. Just as surely we can work with Jesus to set them free.

I remember a couple years ago at the Gardere Christian School banquet, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade boy videoed his testimony of what the school had meant to him. He talked about his teacher. “At first I thought might teacher was just another white lady trying to do good.” The subtext there was “I thought she’d be another guilty privileged person treating me like a project.” He went on, “But after a while, I realized she really loves me.” Subtext, “She came to where I am. She sees me. She knows me. She cares for me.” So he concluded, “Now I feel so happy coming to school. I believe in the Jesus she told me about.” Subtext, “Because she lived his love in front of me. She unbound my graveclothes. Jesus brought me back to life through her.”

This kind of unbinding and stone-moving can happen in a thousand ways. The key is in 1) our prayers and 2) our seeing others. And these two are linked. Here at First Pres, we place huge emphasis on pressing deeply into Jesus. Devotional reading, worship and prayer propel us into Christ. And that has a very practical result. We learn to see the world through his eyes. To feel the suffering and pain in the world with his heart. As we press into the heart of Jesus, he opens our heart to the world he came to save. There’s nothing more practical than prayer. And there’s nothing more spiritual than seeing, feeling and caring for the pain of others. They fit together hand in glove. Only Jesus, on a mission from the Father in the power of the Spirit can raise the dead. But he asks us to pray for the dead to rise. To be moved in compassion for their plight. And then, wherever possible to move stones and unbind graveclothes so the dead can walk out into the light.



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<sup>1</sup> Painting by Nicole Joiner 2023, [https://www.etsy.com/shop/NicoleJoinerArt?ref=shop-header-name&listing\\_id=957021347](https://www.etsy.com/shop/NicoleJoinerArt?ref=shop-header-name&listing_id=957021347)

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “Jesus Wept,” June 23, 1889, <https://www.spurgeon.org/collection/metropolitan-tabernacle-pulpit-volume-35/>.

<sup>3</sup> Painting by Leon Bonnat, 1857, France.

<sup>4</sup> Painting by Giotto, 1306, Scroveni Chapel, Italy