

“The Final Journey”
 Acts 27:39-28:2
 John 11:17-36
 Rev. David Hutchinson
 Sunday, March 29, 2020

John’s gospel is different.

The other gospels tell the story of Jesus life differently from John.

The other gospels report events and John reports conversations.

Chapter after chapter of John report long extended conversations.

Between Jesus and Nicodemus,

and then a woman from Samaria who he meets at a well...

and then a man born blind...

In Matthew, Mark and Luke the TRIGGER event - - that precedes Jesus entry into Jerusalem - - Jesus’ passion - - and the cross of Jesus - - the trigger event is the turning over of the tables in the Temple. Jesus challenges the corruption and the power of Rome and of the Synagogue - - and it leads to his execution.

John reports Jesus turning over the tables - - in much greater detail than the other gospels.

But John tells us about that right at the beginning.

In chapter 2!

John assumes we already agree about corruption and power.

What more is there to say about that...?

And so - - in John - - there is a different trigger event - - for Jesus road to death.

In John the event that precedes Jesus entry into Jerusalem is the raising of Lazarus.

Not a challenge to corrupt power - - but some conversations about eternal life.

Jesus death on the cross leads to MORE than the Kingdom on earth.

Jesus death leads to resurrection.

And resurrection leads to eternal life.

Eternal life for US - - you and me - - here and now!

Eternal life for John is not about - - heaven some day.

Eternal life is now.

And so is death.

What is the quality of your life NOW?

What are our conversations - - with each other - - like?

In John - - Lazarus death - - and then his being raised by Jesus - - revolve around some conversations - - between Jesus - - and two women: Martha - - and Mary.

These conversations are the heart of the matter.

It's not that John doesn't care about politics - - or corruption - - or justice.

But John sets those concerns - - in a more eternal - - frame.

What is your life like - - now.

Do you feel dead inside?

Or do you have compassionate relationships - - and conversations?

And how about your relationship with God?

Do you have prayerful conversations - - with Jesus?

Jesus - - the Holy Spirit - - Advocate - - Counselor...?

Jesus - - who said his Spirit would not leave us...

For John's gospel - - death is NOW - - and the fullness of LIFE is - - NOW.

And so this story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead - - revolves around these conversations - - about the resurrection - - and eternal life.

Martha and Mary - - both talk to Jesus - - in the midst of their grief.

Lazarus has died.

Their brother - - has died.

And they both begin the conversation with Jesus the same way:

“If you had just - - been here - - he would not have died.”

And Jesus reassures them:

“I am the resurrection and the life”

DEATH - - does NOT win.

LIFE wins.

LOVE wins.

These conversations are not theological dialogues.

They are not teaching moments.

These conversations - - are about connection.

They weep - - as the talk.

They cry - - and they hope.

The verse: “Jesus wept” is the shortest verse in the Bible.

But it is probably one of the most powerful.

So what about the quality of our conversations?

What are our conversations like - - with others?

Conversations about big important or serious and scary things?

What are our conversations like - - around death - - or a serious illness?

Conversations in the hospital...

Conversations about a worldwide virus...

What sort of conversations do we have about our fears?

Conversations about our future...

Conversations about pollution...

Conversations about planning for what happens if we get seriously ill...

If we take John as our guide - - and these conversations with Jesus...

...we can see redemptive power - - in conversations that lead to hope.

Why do you think Jesus weeps - - during this conversation?

Is he really that upset about the doubts of Martha and Mary?

I can't really believe that...

It doesn't fit with all the rest I know of Jesus.

So - - is he angry at the destructive power of death?

Maybe...

Is this John's Gethsemane scene?

Because in John's gospel - - there is no story of the garden of Gethsemane.

The garden comes later - - after the resurrection - - for John.

Maybe it is simply love.

Verse 36 says, "See how he loved him"

God's amazing - - amazing - - love.

I believe that.

I think it is at the heart of - - this conversation - - with Martha and Mary.

Jesus is preparing them - - for the final journey of life.

Like Lazarus final journey - - from death - - to life.

As I think about that phrase: "the final journey" a lot comes to mind.

What is the journey like for us - - through death into life...?

What do we leave behind - - in this world?

And HOW do we leave it?

Those questions set the stage for the Acts reading for me.

So today - - the scripture reading from Acts will be framed by John.

This is the opposite of the past four Sundays.

For the past four Sundays the history in Acts - - has set the stage for these conversations in John. / The story of the spread of the Holy Spirit - - in Acts - - IS in a sense - - anticipated - - by these amazing conversations. / So today - - as we move toward Holy Week and Easter - - it seems to me that this moment at Lazarus tomb - - is at the heart of the gospel.

So what about Paul's final journey - - in Acts?

What does Paul leave behind?

How does Paul leave things at the end of his life?

What can we learn - - for our lives - - from looking at Paul's?

It has always astounded me that Paul and his companions land at Malta.

After travelling all over the Mediterranean starting churches - - Paul has been on trial in front of ruler after ruler - - and then he appeals to be heard in Rome. / So they set sail for Rome and travel during bad weather - - rather than wait it out. / And in the midst of a great storm the ship is destroyed. / Soldiers and prisoners - - all work together - - in order to save their lives.

And after the ship completely breaks apart - - they swim to shore on left over boards.

And they have NO IDEA where they are.

Shipwrecked.

And it turns out - - they are EXACTLY where they had hoped to end up.

Malta - - is just at the tip of Italy.

Now - - in the current global situation - - NO ONE wants to travel to Rome!

Not on a cruise ship - - now on broken bits of lumber.

But in Paul's story - - it is a PROVIDENTIAL destination.

God's mercy - - and Paul's trust - - turn out to be enough.

No one knows exactly HOW Paul's life ended.

The story stops in Rome.

We don't have any other evidence.

This was - - Paul's final journey.

It was a story - - of courage and conviction.

Courage in the face of amazing challenges.

Maybe that is the best we can hope for in our own lives:

To live the courage of our convictions.

To live - - trusting in God's amazing mercy.

And to do that knowing - - that death - - never has the last word.

May it be so - - for you and for me.