

Resurrection Pause and Rewind

Sermon Theme: Hold that scene: Christ is the resurrection and the life after all!

Text: John 11:1–45 (46–53)

Other Lessons: Ezekiel 37:1–14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:1–11

Goal: That the hearers see in Lazarus’s resurrection a foreshadowing not just of Jesus’ resurrection, but of their own as well.

This Fifth Sunday in Lent is the last one of that season before Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion. It begins Passiontide, which encompasses both the fifth week in Lent and Holy Week. The gravitational pull of Holy Week is heavy pulling our minds and hearts toward our Lord’s impending crucifixion and resurrection for us. In its Propers, it reflects both the penitential themes of its own season, Lent, and also the joy of redemption and resurrection of that holiest of days only two weeks away—Easter. With Lazarus and his loved ones, we face death. But we also celebrate rising from death. The promise of resurrection is both spoken and vividly displayed in the *Old Testament Reading*, Ezekiel’s encounter with the Lord in the valley of dry bones. In the *Epistle*, Paul reminds the Romans of their own resurrection, made possible by “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (8:11).

Sermon Outline

Introduction: “Lazarus is dead.” This is how we would normally describe someone whose life had ended, whose body was buried, sealed up in a tomb, concealed by a stone, rotting in the darkness, and starting to stink. But “Lazarus is dead” is not how Jesus speaks. Jesus says, “Lazarus is sleeping.” Why? Because, while death is for us a very final sort of thing, for Jesus, the immortal Son of God, death is but a sleep from which the faithful will rise. This Jesus’ disciples failed to grasp: Lazarus was only sleeping, because sooner than later, Lazarus would get up. He would get up because Jesus would raise him. He would get up because Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and the one who believes in him shall never die. This is the point for today: when you have Jesus, you not only have the resurrection and the life in the future; you have the resurrection and the life right now, as your own present possession. And that means those who have Jesus in faith never die, only sleep, in the certain hope of getting up again. Eternal life is ours already in Christ. Our Lord wants everyone to believe this. And so, in our text, he takes an opportunity:

The Death of Lazarus Is Jesus’ Opportunity to Show the World He Is the Resurrection and the Life.

What would you say is the greatest invention in our world today? Well, I’m not sure how I’d really vote, but at least honorable mention would go to the pause button, with rewind and fast-forward as close runners-up. These buttons on the remote control allow us to hold or replay our favorite moments in sports or movies. But what if we could use them on the Bible? We do have a moving story before us in the Gospel, after all—the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

You know the basic story. Jesus gets word that his friend is sick. He waits a couple of days, but then, even though it puts his life in danger, he heads for Bethany. By the time he arrives, Lazarus has died. Martha and Mary, Lazarus’s sisters, both hope Jesus will still help. And Jesus does, though not without first weeping. He raises Lazarus back to life, leading Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders to begin their plot to kill Jesus. Great story!

5. What’s your favorite part? Pause. Rewind.
 - a. I love Jesus’ bold words to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life” (v 25). How heroic! Jesus has come to save the day, and not even death can stop him. He is God in the flesh, after all.
 - b. And what about Martha’s words in reply?: “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (v 27). Who would have thought that poor, “preoccupied with housework, “Martha could say something so profound? She’s like Cinderella at the ball.

- c. Still, that scene at the tomb was amazing, wasn't it? They were all worried about the smell, and then Jesus shouts, "Lazarus, come out" (v 43). And he does! Awesome!
- 4. The drama was pretty good too. Pause. Rewind.
 - a. What an amazing setup for the whole episode. The cool, calm,, and collected Jesus doesn't panic when he gets the news Lazarus is sick. He even delays a few days until after Lazarus has died, knowing full well he'll bring him back to life when he gets to Bethany.
 - b. And what about his disciples? They're the complete opposite, all panicky and worried. Jesus tries to clue them in, but they just don't get it.
 - c. Oh, and when Martha first sees Jesus—how moving is that! "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v 21). Then Mary says the very same thing and falls at Jesus' feet weeping! Such agony! But we know, right along with Jesus, what's about to happen.
- 3. Wait a minute (v 35). Why are there tears on Jesus' face? Back that up!
 - a. Something's wrong here. The hero isn't supposed to be crying. Why is he crying? All along he's been Mister Cool,Calm,, and Collected, the hero with the plan, all Clint Eastwood-like. And now tears?
 - b. Perhaps they're for Mary and Martha. He *is* a compassionate guy, after all, and you'd have to be made of stone not to be moved by their heartache, right?
 - c. But still, he knows what's about to happen. All of that sadness is about to be replaced with joy! He is the resurrection, planning all along to give life to the one now dead, and yet he cries? Something here still doesn't add up.

Transition: Hit the pause right there. Check out his eyes! Watch him as he looks at Mary and then over at the crowd. Wow! It's like he sees them and yet sees past them. It's almost as though . . .

- 2. Did Jesus hit fast-forward?
 - a. Does he see another Mary, his mother, weeping, in the company of mourners?
 - b. Does he hear another accusation: "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (Mt 27:42)?
 - c. Does he feel the pain of a rescue that doesn't come? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46).
 - d. Does he see another tomb, but this time it's *his* body that's laid inside? Perhaps.
- 1. Let's us fast-forward now.
 - a. The tears, though very real, are momentary. They pass, and Jesus calls forth Lazarus in a resurrection that not only foreshadows his, but ours also.
 - b. Jesus raises Lazarus, knowing full well that it will finally mobilize his enemies to get him killed.
 - c. That, however, has been his plan all along—a plan that, ironically, is left to Jesus' chief human adversary, Caiaphas, to explain (vv 49–50). Jesus has come to die for his people and, by so doing, gather all God's children together (vv 51–52).
 - d. It's good to see that Jesus doesn't float through the events of our story unaffected. No cold, calculating deity here, unmoved by human suffering. Our sin and pain wound him, but he bears them freely, not willing for death to have the final say.

Hold That Scene:

Christ Is the Resurrection and the Life After All!

To believe in Jesus is to have his resurrection and life right now. Our Lord let Lazarus die so he could teach this to the world. May the Holy Spirit, who comes through the Word preached and proclaimed, teach you this, that you, too, believe and have life eternal.

Conclusion: As we rewind for one final look at the plot, we see this was all just foreshadowing—a preview of something bigger yet to come. Fast-forward. Resurrection coming on the heels of suffering and death? Death being swallowed up by life? It's Holy Week in miniature! And it would seem there's much more of this story left to tell. Amen