

## *“In the Absence of God”*

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Psalm 130

John 11:1-23

April 6, 2014

*Let us pray...*

The story of Lazarus is one that perhaps rings familiar to us. Jesus continues on his journey to Jerusalem. He is approximately two miles away.

And we, the church, are two weeks away from *an empty tomb*. How fitting it is to be reading the story of Lazarus today this Fifth Sunday of Lent, to ground us in what is to come.

Lazarus is the brother of Martha and Mary. They sent Jesus a message that alludes to Jesus' affection for Lazarus - "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (vs. 3.)

One would think that with a message like that Jesus or anyone would promptly go to be with the person who is ill. However, the story tell us "accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after hearing that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." (vs. 6.)

So, during Jesus absence, clearly Lazarus dies. When Jesus arrives, Martha says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (vs. 21.)

The elements of grief were all present: frustration, questioning, lack of understanding, pain, mourning, hopelessness.

Not only for those who where there, but Jesus too, as we learned that "Jesus began to weep." Jesus' humanity was evident as he was moved by sadness.

Death is the last stop on this earth. It is the ultimate destination in this life and Lazarus was dead -- nothing else to do now. You are late, Jesus. Perhaps someone said, "Why did he even bother to come now? It is too late."

Jesus asks, “Where have you laid him?” And called Lazarus out of his tomb. After Jesus called out, he turned to the community that had gathered there and he said, “Unbind him and let him go”(vs. 44.)

When all seemed too lost, there is an opportunity at new life.

Clearly this morning, we are not physically dead and no one is calling for our physical resurrection.

But “what if” God calls is calling us out of the metaphorical tombs in which we are buried: hopelessness, guilt, depression, loss, pain. But what if is God offering us a new life, a new beginning.

But what if God also calls us to unbind “systemic injustice.”

We tend to see God is the resurrection, but not in the death. We see God in the blessings, but not in the need.

In the words of Carter Heyward:

*But what if....*

In seeking to feel better, we are avoiding God’s moving us toward growth?

In seeking God always as light we are missing God as darkness?

In avoiding change, we are missing God’s plea for us to move into the wonder of some unknown possibility?

In perceiving God as our Father, we are refusing to be nurtured at the breast of God as our Mother?

In seeing God as only in our own colors, shapes...we are blinded to God’s presence in others’ colors...?

In looking for God in the magnanimous...we are overlooking God in the most unremarkable places...?

In perceiving God always in that which is sacred...we are failing to see God in the secular...?<sup>1</sup>

I would add - but what if, in perceiving God in the resurrection, we miss God in the “unbinding.”

May we begin to seek (God) Him in desolation, feeling nothing but God’s absence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carter Heyward, *Our passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984) 27,28.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (New York: Fall River Press, 2003) 231.