

Scripture:

Psalm 130

John 11:1-45

“This will not end the way you think it will.”

As we've all no doubt experienced from time to time ---- things don't always end the way we think they will.

I'm sure we've all had a few ---- “Well that didn't end the way I thought it would!” ----- moments in our lives.

And sometimes they are good and welcomed and other times --- not so much.

Well today in John's gospel -- we most certainly have a ---- “Well that didn't end the way I thought it would.” ---- kind of story.

And in Jesus Christ --- we most certainly have a --- “Well that didn't end the way I thought it would!” ---- story.

And these two stories of Lazarus of Bethany and of Jesus of Nazareth ---- not only both end differently than anticipated ---- they are also intricately woven together.

The story of Lazarus life restored ---- is also the beginning of the story of Jesus losing His life.

Jesus raising Lazarus --- is the tipping point that leads to Jesus' crucifixion.

Once Jesus raises Lazarus the Jewish authorities leap into action --- and go from being passive to actively mapping out the plans for His crucifixion.

The crucifixion of Jesus ---- is no longer just a plan they have in the back of their minds --- they now begin to act on it --- and take the first steps towards ensuring that it actually happens.

Read on just past our passage fro today --- the last verses of John 11 are all about the beginning of the last days of Jesus.

By raising Lazarus back to life --- Jesus secures his own death sentence ---- that's irony if ever there was irony.

This story of Lazarus is all about life --- life restored and then life taken away.

And this story --- doesn't end in the way we might think it might.

For example --- we might think that there would be some rejoicing and celebrating after Lazarus is restored to life --- but nothing --- no party ---- no celebration ---- no rejoicing.

Instead the reaction --- at least the reaction that is recorded ---- is violence -- - the plot to kill Jesus.

Some might have thought --- "Lazarus is dead --- the story will end with a funeral procession and weeping."

Others might have thought ---- "Lazarus will be healed --- Jesus will heal him." ---- and so they might have assumed that the story will end with a great celebration --- a feast with dancing and rejoicing.

But who would have thought that Jesus rescuing a close friend from death would end in violence --- the plot to kill Jesus?

When God acts things often end differently than most people expect them to.

Most of us here likely have the belief that when we die we'll go to heaven.

After all isn't that what the Bible teaches --- isn't that what our faith is all about.

John 3:16 ---"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not die but will have life eternal."

And then our passage today --- beginning at verse 25 ----- "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die ----- and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."

And while I believe all of this ---- I also believe that things will not end the way I think they will.

What exactly this life eternal will look like ----- what exactly this resurrection --- living even though we die --- will look like ----- is likely going to be a whole lot different than we think.

Death will likely be different than many of us think it will be.

The afterlife will likely be different than many of us think it will be.

Dwelling in God's presence eternally will likely be different than many of us think it will be.

Jesus Himself said --- in Matthew in Mark and in slightly different words in Luke ---- "But about that day or hour no one knows --- not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

And he's not just talking when --- he says "But about that day and hour no one knows.

"About that day and hour --- what we might call the end of time --- about that no one knows..." ---- it juts may be different then we think it will be.

And this is exactly the same sentiment in John's gospel today with Lazarus at Bethany ---- things happened in a way that no one would have foreseen --- "this didn't end the way people thought it would end."

And Jesus is still saying this today --- that no one really knows about the end except God.

God is still the supreme surpriser.

Make no mistake about it ----- God is still ----- and always will be the supreme supriser.

We are pretty good at domesticating God ---- and containing God ---- limiting Him --- and thinking that we know how things go.

We think things like ----- “Jesus died on the cross --- I believe and know this to be true ----- I know Him --- I confess Him as Lord and seek forgiveness in His name and live for Him ---- have a personal relationship with Him ----- so --- in the end --- when I die --- I’ll go to heaven to be with Him --- just as the Bible teaches --- just as He said himself in the bible.”

And as true as all of this is ----- I still think things will not end the way we think they will --- God will surprise us.

Exactly how --- and exactly when --- and exactly why --- who knows --- only God does.

But I am pretty confident that thing swill be a little different than we think --
- and that there most definitely will be a few surprises along the way.

And I find that quite refreshing ----- as refreshing as Mary and Martha and the disciples must have found it to be when Jesus simply said to Lazarus --- “Come out.” ----- and he did.

When Jesus said --- “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die ---- and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

He meant it right then and there --- “I am the resurrection and the life --- right now.” ----- take away the stone ---- Lazarus come out.

That’s Jesus in His own words today.

Verse 25 ---- “I am the resurrection and the life the one who believes in me will live even though they die.”

Verse 39 --- “Take away the stone.”

Verse 43 --- “Lazarus come out.”

We tend to think of the resurrection --- resurrection life ---- Easter life --- as something we get later on --- at the end of life ---- when Christ comes gain --
- later on.

But clearly John understands Jesus to be saying something quite different ---
- resurrection life isn't just something for the far off future ---- a distant
grace --- or a distant identity --- or reality.

For John ---- the way he presents Christ and God's saving action is all about
now.

Resurrection lays claim on our lives today.

"I am the resurrection and the life --- take away the stone ---- Lazarus come
out."

Lent is a time to prepare for and work at grasping the deep reality that
because of the cross --- because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross ----
resurrection lays claim on our lives now.

We don't have to wait for death for the resurrection to lay claim on us.

The resurrection can lay claim on us now.

Death is contained within our faith.

God --- Jesus is the Lord of life and of death.

Death is no longer --- if it ever even was --- death is no longer a kind of
opponent --- over there --- separated --- not of God.

Instead our faith mysteriously contains death.

Jesus very calmly --- unhurriedly --- remember when He hears about
Lazarus death He takes His time.

Jesus calmly and unhurriedly goes to Bethany ----- "This sickness will not
end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified
through it."

Jesus calmly and unhurriedly goes to Bethany --- taking His time -----
and it's as if He's saying ---- "This will not end the way you think it will." --
-- as He travels there.

Both life and death --- both Lazarus's life and death ----- our very lives and our very deaths ---- are held within God's embrace.

Death is rooted in God --- not separate or outside of Him.

And we have the cross to remind ourselves of this.

Lazarus ---- Mary ---Martha and His disciples ---- don't have the cross experience to go on --- so they are all there and Jesus shows them that human death is something that is already contained in the life of God and not something separate from Him.

Jesus takes the quintessential human limitation --- death ---- and removes its limitations on us --- showing us that it too is a part of the life of God --- it too is rooted in God.

Listen to this exchange at the heart of our passage today ----- picking it up at verse 21 -----

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die ----- and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

In other words when Jesus says ----- “Martha your brother is fine --- not to worry he will live again --- he's fine.”

And Martha says -- “Well of course I know he's fine ----- of course I know that he'll live again at the end of time.”

It's as if Jesus interrupts her and says --- “Oh no Martha resurrection life begins now --- not just at the end of time --- but now.

I --- here and now --- right here and right now ----- I am the resurrection and the life.”

And of course that's quite the surprise.

This isn't how it's supposed to happen --- this isn't how it's supposed to end
---- resurrection ----- now?

Isn't that supposed to be later on ----- at the end of time?

But Jesus has a surprise --- it's resurrection right now --- and up rises Lazarus.

Resurrection life applies here and now.

The kingdom of God applies here and now --- it's not just some later ---- far off ----- future glory kind of thing.

“Thy kingdom come --- thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” --- Jesus taught His disciples to pray ---- we say it every week in the Lord's Prayer.

The kingdom is to be done --- lived here on earth and not just later --- in heaven.

Resurrection life is for now.

With God --- things rarely end the way we think they will.

This beautiful new life story --- dead man Lazarus coming back to life doesn't end in celebration and joy and revelry --- it ends in violence --- the authorities putting in motion the plot to kill Jesus.

This whole sequence of events didn't end the way anyone thought it would.

When Jesus asks to have the stone taken away in verse 38 there is some concern about the stench that will come out of the tomb --- Lazarus has been decomposing in there for 4 days --- it would certainly stink.

Verse 39 ----- “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

Then Jesus said ---- verse 40 ---- “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

In other words ---- the glory of God isn't limited by things of this world ----- stink ----- and the glory of God isn't just for later on it is for now too.

“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” --- Jesus says.

And then He goes on to say --- in the very next verse ---- verse 41 ----- “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

Jesus makes it clear ---- “God is here now --- among us.”

God dwells among us and we dwell among God now --- and God acts now.

Lazarus --- Mary – Martha --- the disciples – experience the glory of God --- right then.

It's not Lazarus will be raised --- it's not Jesus will one day be the resurrection and the life --- it's not one day --- later on you will see the glory of God.

Instead it's ---- Lazarus is raised --- I am the resurrection ----- God's glory is now.

The words Jesus shares with His disciples are not thy kingdom come thy will be done in heaven ----- it's thy kingdom come --- thy will be done --- on earth and in heaven ---- on earth --- here and now --- as well as --- in heaven.

We domesticate God ----- and we also grieve God ---- if we think we know just how He is going to act in any given situation.

Yes we can know that God will fulfill the promise He made that Jesus will come again and draw us to Himself.

As John recounts --- just beyond our reading today in John 14 --- “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's

house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Yes we know that Jesus has prepared a place for us and that He will take us to that place --- but that’s not the end either --- that’s but another beginning.

That’s another beginning not the end.

And that’s the beauty of it --- we carry on --- into eternity --- without knowing exactly what eternity looks like --- other than it’s beautiful and then some.

There is a room prepared for us --- yes for sure.

If we believe we don’t die but live eternally --- yes for sure.

He is the resurrection and the life --- yes for sure.

But these aren’t the end --- they’re other steps --- steps into the eternal continuum that is the life of faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We’re promised life in the presence of God but Jesus never describes this as the end --- we’ve constructed it as the end.

What is the end with God anyway --- is there ever even an end with God?

As humans we speak of endings ---- but does God ever speak of a final ending?

There is no end to the glorious future God holds for us.

Things will not end the way we think they will precisely because the concept of the end is misleading in the first place.

Once again --- in John 11 --- as in so many other instances --- virtually every instance of His life --- once again Jesus presents to those with Him ---- a horizon that goes way beyond the one by which they had been living and measuring things.

Jesus blows to pieces all that they held as true --- as good and faithful as some of it may have been.

Martha's response in verse 24 is pretty faithful --- very faithful in fact ---- after Jesus says "Your brother will rise again." ---- she replies ----- "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

But even that Jesus blows to pieces ----- by initiating resurrection life right then and there.

And that's precisely what Jesus does time and time again --- that's what God does time and time again ---- expands our horizon.

If we allow Him to ----- God will amaze us continually --- if we can find it within ourselves not to limit Him ---- and not to think we know how everything is going to turn out or end --- He surprises us over and over again.

"This will not end the way you think it will." --- is a pretty good way to sum up any situation where God is present.

"This will not end the way you think it will." --- is a pretty good way to sum things up knowing that God is in control.

And --- John 11 ----- stands as a prime example of things going radically different than anyone there had ever imagined.

When Jesus says ---- in verse 4---- "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

He's speaking about all kinds of things --- this sickness --- this pain ---- this death ---- this suffering ---- will not end the way you think it will --- senselessly --- or without purpose or meaning ---- "No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." --- He says.

Christ preaches new things.

Christ preaches that death is not death --- that afflictions are not signs of an angry God ---that suffering isn't senseless or meaningless ----- instead God is glorified through these things.

These things --- pain ---- suffering --- illness ----- are not signs of an angry --
- careless --- out of control God.

Faithful Lazarus most dear to Christ ---- is afflicted with illness and suffers death not because of any anger --- or lose of control on the part of God ----- but so that God's glory might be evident in and through Him.

The world often chooses accolades --- wealth --- power and intellectual acumen to get praise ---- God chooses far less obvious and far less likely things ---- often broken --- humble --- pushed off to the side things --- to bring glory to His name.

And Christ preaches new things.

Christ preaches that death is not death --- and that afflictions are not signs of abandonment --- or anger.

Christ teaches that things will very likely end a bit differently than we think they will.

That was certainly the case in Bethany at the home of Mary Martha and Lazarus --- and it's no different in our homes.

It's no different in Whitby --- Ajax --- Oshawa --- Pickering --- Brooklin --- Courtice --- Seagrave --- Bowmanville --- and so on.

As good as we think we are at knowing things and figuring them out ---- chances are --- gospel chances are ----- this will still not end the way we think that it will.

And that is a great comfort because it means that God is here in our midst --- and it means that God is still intimately at work in His creation and in each and every one of us.

God is the great surpriser.

And as long as He is in our midst --- anything is possible.

Easter --- even is possible.

Our God is great.

Our God is greater.

Our God is Easter ----- and new life.

And our God is now.

With God things rarely end they way we think they will.

What we call an ending is but another opportunity for God's glory.

“This sickness will not end in death.

No --- it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.”

“This cross --- will not end in death.

No --- it is for God's glory so that the Son may be glorified through it.”

And so much more as well.

What we may think of as an end --- is just another opportunity with God.

To God be the glory.

Amen