

March 22, 2015 Fifth Sunday of Lent
Lent Preaching Series: "Giving it Up"
Giving Up Our Lives
John 11:38-45

Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them.

But Martha, the dead man's sister, protested, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible."

Jesus responded, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?" So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me." Then Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!"

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen.

We are in the season called Lent and only two weeks from Easter. The tradition of Lent was created for the purpose of preparing us through prayer, meditation, Bible reading, repentance of sins, and self-denial. Lent prepares us for Easter as we reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. During Lent we fast or give up certain things as a form of repentance or as a way to express sorrow and remorse, for having sinned; and to think more deeply about our faith. All of this is meant to help us connect with God, and be more devoted to Jesus. Giving up something for Lent suggests that after Lent we will no longer give it up. This year we wanted to suggest the giving up of a number of things not only for Lent but forever. Like...

Giving Up Control

To seek God's will for our lives rather than calling all the shots ourselves.

Giving Up Expectations

We just don't know what the future holds, but we can trust that God will be with us through whatever circumstances we face and that God will work with us, for us, and in us what is best even in the most hopeless places.

Giving Up Superiority

God wants us to give up our judgmental attitudes.

Giving Up Enemies

Jesus wants us to follow His example of loving our enemies.

(and, as we will look at today) **Giving Up Our Lives**

Jesus tells us that those who try to keep their lives will die, but those who give up their lives for Him will live.

Matthew 16:25

If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

A person who tries "to hang on to" his or her life in order to satisfy desires and goals apart from God ultimately "loses" life. They try to make life work without God and find it doesn't really work at all. And not only does that person not receive the eternal life offered only to those who believe and accept Christ as Savior, but they lose the fullness of life here and now promised to those who believe.

Jesus wants us to choose life, real life; to follow Him rather than to lead a life of sin and self-satisfaction. He wants us to stop trying to control our own destiny and to let Him direct us. And doesn't that make good sense because, as the Creator, Christ knows better than we do what real life is about.

Don't misunderstand, Jesus is not asking for self-hatred, He asks for submission; He asks only that we lose our self-centered determination to be in charge and we let Him take over. And when we give our lives in service to Christ we discover the real purpose of living.

Lazarus means "Whom God helps." Many of us are quite familiar with the story of the raising of Lazarus yet, there are a few commands that Jesus gave in the story which we should heed to as well. You can be a Lazarus this morning, or you can be one whom God helps. What instructions would Jesus have for you today?

The first command Jesus gives is REMOVE
(v39a) "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them.

"Roll the stone aside," – remove the stone

This stone is what separated Lazarus from Jesus, it was keeping Jesus from being nearer to Lazarus and Lazarus nearer to Jesus.

- The stone was the one thing that stood between Jesus and Lazarus and the Lord wanted it removed.

What is that thing that stands between you and Jesus, Jesus wants it removed. He loves you and wants to be in a closer relationship with you.

- Are there some things in your life that need to be moved from where they are right now to a place which will cause you to be closer to Jesus?

It may be some sin or it may not be bad things or sinful things at all. It could be things like a relationship; your job; a hobby; your schedule; etc. It could be sin or it could just

be something that would not be sin for others, but it is sin for you; because the thing about it is, It keeps you from being closer to Jesus.

- Let me caution you...there may be people who are quite close to you who may have some objections or strong opinions about you removing these things.

(v39b) Martha, the dead man's sister, protested, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible."

- Your relatives or other people close to you know how bad your situation stinks and how long you have been that way...don't let it stop you!
- This morning, I want to challenge you to remove any stones that may be standing in the way of your getting as close to Jesus as possible.

(v40) Jesus responded, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?"

If you believe you will see the power and goodness of God. Trust God and you will see Him do what only He can do.

(vs 41-42)

So they rolled the stone aside. [Notice that some help was needed. You too may need the help or counsel of others. Don't refuse it. Get all the help you can to remove the hindrance to coming to Jesus.] Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me."

In prayer we are confident that God listens, He hears us; but we are arrogant if we claim we know how God will answer. We do not know how or what only Whom. Know that God listens, but before you ask for anything always pray first, "Your will be done."

Remove the stone, believe and trust in Jesus and you will see the glory of God. But only if you ...

RESPOND

(vs 43, 44a)

Then Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out,

There is something here that can easily be missed. Jesus prays, loud enough for the people standing there to hear, but He's praying. Then it says Jesus shouted. Literally, He cried out with a loud and mighty shout. It was an expression of His authority and divine power. He had the power and authority to call back the spirit of the dead to reenter and give the dead body life. "Lazarus, come out!" Notice that He called him by name...

Jesus had to call out Lazarus by name for if he hadn't, all the dead would have come out of their graves!

- Augustine

- But it wasn't enough to hear from Jesus, obedience needed to take place
- Look closely at this verse...Lazarus was commanded to do something that no one had ever been asked to do before.
- Lazarus was commanded by the Lord to do something that really didn't make a whole lot of sense.
- Do you find yourself being commanded to do something that really doesn't make sense to you or to the people around you?

What if from inside of the grave, Lazarus yelled back, "I don't want to come out! It's comfortable in here. Nobody judges me in here and if I come out, people are going to expect me to be different."

That's the challenge that we face. Jesus is calling each one of us by name to come out of the grave. To be different people. To not stay in the darkness, to not stay in the place of death to not stay in grave clothes, but to live this life. This abundant life.

What is Jesus commanding you to do? Whatever that command may be, obey the Lord and let HIM deal with the consequences that follow.

Jesus wants you to remove what separates you from Him, but He will not force you to come out, you must choose to obey Him. When you do it will be like going from death to life.

Lazarus could say, "I was dead but now because of Jesus, I live." He was fulfilling what Jesus said in...

John 5:25

"And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it's here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live."

You can go from darkness to light, from death to life, from carnal to spiritual. Christ is calling, but you must respond and heed His call. It is then that you will find...

RELEASE

(v44)

And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!"

Free him of the death-wrap and let him go.

- A miracle took place but Lazarus was still quite limited. Many of us have had great experiences with the Lord but today we are limited by the things that we are all wrapped up with!

- Look at Lazarus...he was limited in four areas:

His Walk---feet

His Work---hands

His Watchfulness---face

His Witness---mouth

- What are you all wrapped up with today?

Sin

Intimidation

Others' Opinions

Worry

- Allow the Lord to release you today from anything that is limiting you

Jesus says to us, "do you love me? Do you trust me? Then surrender everything and come follow Me."

Lazarus could not free himself, but...

John 8:36

So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.

Old habits, sinful behavior, painful memories, require to be gently and lovingly removed. They are no longer needed like grave clothes they may need to be unwrapped and removed.

REVEAL

(v45)

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen.

- Others saw what Jesus did in Lazarus' life and they put their faith in God

John 12:9-11

When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

It was because of Lazarus that many believed in Jesus. Lazarus did even say anything, but there was no denying that he had new life. It reminds me of the famous quote...

“At all times preach the Gospel and when necessary...use words.”
- St Francis of Assisi

- May the people around us see what the Lord has done in our lives and cause them to believe.

You can't do what God has called you to do while still bound in grave clothes.

Lazarus was raised for a purpose. Jesus didn't raise Lazarus just for the sake of doing it. Lazarus became a living witness for Christ.

If Christianity was a crime (as it is in many nations) would there be enough evidence to convict you? Would you be found guilty or not guilty of belonging to Jesus?

- What experience do you need this morning?
- Do you need to REMOVE something between you & Jesus?
- Do you need to RESPOND to a command of Jesus?
- Do you need to be RELEASED from something that is limiting you?
- Do you need to REVEAL to others what God had done for you?