



“Are You Mad, Yet?”

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Scripture (NRSV):

John 11:1-45

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?"

14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said

to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 43 He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Sermon:

I am mad, are you?

Mad at people who hoard masks and sanitizer that our medical personnel and first responders need. Mad that the commander in chief would epitomize this by saying that the governors who need these supplies should "be nice to him" if they want any of the federal stockpile of these emergency supplies.

It makes me "mad enough to spit", as my mother would have said.

But then, this week, I admit I have gone from anger to tears at the speed of a jet...one minute mad, the next minute tears simply pool in my eyes and slide down my face. I cry for people I know and people I don't. I cry because it's sad and scary and weird and overwhelming.

These emotions need some place to go. Yours do, too. As Scott Berinato put it in an article from the Harvard Business Review, "when you name it, you feel it and it moves through you. Emotions need motion."

It makes sense to me. Emotions can't remain inside without becoming something like a volcano or a pressure cooker...at some point they will come out, explosively.

So, with the advice of professionals and of your pastor, I urge you to let your feelings move through you...and again, in Scott's words, "It's absurd to think we shouldn't feel grief right now. Let yourself feel the grief...and keep going."

Take a page from the sisters, Mary and Martha. Did you hear how they talked to their friend and Messiah???

If that's not the emotional swings of extreme grief, I don't know what is!

Listen to their anger, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." They both say it...in grief, in anger, in frustration. I'm betting they were crying, too, faces all blotchy, eyes swollen, hiccupping.

And then listen to their quieter grief, as Martha says to Jesus, in grief mixed with exhaustion and maybe a little faith, "yes, I know he will rise again, on the last day."

It's small comfort now! But she knows Jesus is trying to comfort her with his reminder of the resurrection of the righteous on the last day. It's thin comfort, but, it's some comfort.

I'll tell you what's more comforting than a theology of the resurrection...it's the fact that Jesus is there! Sometimes you just need someone who loves you, to be beside you. Sometimes, the only thing you can do, is be with that person in their grief.

Mary comes to him, weeping, and he weeps with her and her sister (vs. 33-35).

When the world you know comes apart and your heart is breaking...then you cry. And the best friend is not the one who tells you comforting platitudes, but the one who simply sits with you and cries with you.

They are the kind of friend who knows that emotions have to move through you. They won't stay the same, crowding you with the blackness of grief, forever. They will move on. Because "emotions need motion".

So Mary is crying, and Martha is crying, and Jesus is crying.

And the emotions move on...to something new.

A life restored; changed, but life once again.

It is possible for you and me, too. It is possible for our world, too. A life different, but nonetheless life.

Our Conference Minister, Mike Denton, looked at this text and saw its hope...but he also noticed, that on the other side of this worldwide experience of death, there will be a stink! Martha says it to Jesus, “four days dead, it’s gonna be a stink, Jesus” and he calls out to Lazarus anyway. To come out and come to life again.

On the other side of this vast confusion and grief, there is life, but also there is messiness.

A seed has to shatter its shell to grow. Babies are born in the midst of blood and water and sweat and messiness.

Our world may indeed come to a new life, but it is gonna be messy, it is indeed messy right now.

It stinks how much this is costing us all, how much disruption, terror, death and grief is cloaking the world right now.

But this is the only way I have ever known us humans to be; learning from death and grief, from anger and frustration, from terror and collapse. Learning from emotions that move through us, and that we keep moving through...we keep going, through the messiness of it all.

- Move through with compassion, with as much patience as you can muster when you’ve been crowded into your home with those same people too many days!
- Say how you feel, but keep your emotions moving. Don’t get stuck...Keep going.
- Move through with an understanding that it stinks, and it is messy.

But we believe in the possibility of a new life. Other emotions will come.

We don’t know what the new life will feel like or look like. There are stories that say Lazarus was forever changed by his time in the world of the dead, and then being called back into his life. Everything was so different, after that experience.

I believe we will be changed, too. I believe that we will have new eyes, and new vision. New heart for one another, new communion and connection.

Life, on the other side, of death. Amen.