

Life Restored

March 22, 2026

Today we are going to hear a story that you might have heard before. It is from the gospel of John. I am hoping today that maybe you can hear this passage with fresh ears and possibly new insights. One of the challenges that I face each year during this season is attempting to listen to something familiar with new ears. I'm going to share with you a little trick that I have learned before I begin reading.

Take a deep breath. I want you to use your imagination and let the people and the settings wash over you. Think about what the area looks like and the people are wearing. Feel the temperature of the day on your skin and the brightness of the day illuminating what you see. Hear the background noises and smell or sniff the air occasionally to open your senses. Allow your gaze to soften or close your eyes as you hear this passage now. John 11:1-45

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 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?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. 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."

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And

when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 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. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, 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.

Think Pair Share

What did Bethany look like?

Where were Jesus and the disciples when they heard the news about Lazarus' illness?

What did the disciples' faces look like when Jesus was talking about "sleeping" and being "dead"?

What did Martha look like when she met Jesus on the road, what was she wearing, what were her facial expressions?

What did Mary look like when she met Jesus on the road, what was she wearing, what were her facial expressions?

What did the crowd of mourners look like, what were they wearing, what were their facial expressions?

What time of day was it? How do you know?

What happened when Jesus began to cry?

What did the tomb with the stone look like?

How bad was the smell?

What did Lazarus look like when he came out?

What were the onlookers saying when he came out?

Why did Jesus say unbind him?

Now I want you to think internally about this. I am going to read 2 statements, one from Jesus and one from Walter Bruggemann who passed away just last year and he was a famous Theologian in our time. Ok ready,

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in

me will never die." Bruggemann said, "Lent is learning to reject the conclusion of empire and to trust the stunning freedom and power of the God who gives life." Do these two quotes shape who we are as a Christian? Do we tie ourselves more to the empire or to God? What might we need to do in order to untie ourselves from the empire? What might we need to do in order to bind ourselves to God? When Jesus told the crowd to unbind Lazarus, he was symbolically showing that Lazarus could no longer be bound to death.

Final thought Jesus says in the gospel of John "I am" 7 times. When Moses found the burning bush and asked who are you, God said, "I am." What am I as a Christian and maybe more importantly What am I not? Some things to ponder in this 5th week of Lent. Amen.