

John 11:1-45
March 22, 2026

The Living of Our Lives

The Christian faith has always been a thinking faith, one that asked after the meaning of our lives, and of history, and of faith itself. It has asked the question of God, “who are you?” While it is true that human beings are capable of a great deal of reflection and discovery, they are also capable of great mistakes, what can sometimes only be called foolishness; and sometimes worse.

There is, and has been as far back as history can see, an affirmation of God as the source of life and goodness, and of the participation of God in the life of the world, beginning with Creation; and very personally, with its people, right on through to Redemption and the Consummation of the Age with the Return of Christ.

There has also been a corresponding doubt, a hesitancy, a resistance to, if not a rebellion against, and at least a willingness to reject the idea of God’s Providence and Sovereignty. There is always an attempt to live as if there is no God, as if God is an irrelevancy, and faith is a problem.

Yet faith persists. It persists against those who deny the need for it, or it’s God, or even those who affirm the need for a faith with no object; a kind of general, “faith in faith.” But the greatest obstacle to faith is not in the form of people who do not share it, or who accuse it of some kind of subterfuge or deceit or of

having ulterior motives, but in the face of greater, more substantial threats.

Those threats meet us in the form of, among other things, mortality, death itself; *that* individuals die even if the human race survives, and they are unable to make a great contribution to the living of their lives, whether or not they acknowledge it, is a facet of this problem.

There are many ways that the problem of mortality affects us, but in the main, it is simply that the 23rd psalm is right, we all walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, or in Paul’s words, “we face death all day long.”

The raising of Lazarus is one of the biblical stories that confronts this reality. There are three striking features worthy of our attention; the first is the encounter with the sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, both of whom questioned him, “If you had been here, my brother needn’t have died.”

Maybe in that moment there was some measure of truth to it, but in the grand scheme, it just isn’t true. The reply to Martha is noteworthy. He tries to tell her that the power of death is broken by the power of resurrection,

“I am the Resurrection and the Life,” he says, “the one who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

But he learns she believes in the general resurrection of the dead, and that her view of it is not transformational. It lacks a real and foundational conviction of the defeat of death at the hands of God, which is the meaning of resurrection.

There is also the well-known verse because it is the shortest in the bible, “Jesus wept.” It is a poignant scene. Some of those who were there said, “see how he loved him.” There are all sorts of questions. If Jesus had delayed his arrival into Bethany so *that* Lazarus would die, so *that* he could raise him from the dead, so *that* the disciples would believe, and probably the sisters too, then what is the source of his emotion?

The Christian Faith has always been a feeling faith. The tears of Jesus make sense if we accept the validity of the emotional side of life. The human experience of the inescapability of death and sin is tragic enough to stop someone in their tracks and make them catch their breath, even if it is known that there is a great victory ahead.

Here Jesus is caught up in the human experience of loss, of the powerlessness to avoid participating in the tragic life of the world. Acknowledging the bad news before the good news of our rescue is heard, is a necessary precursor not only because it is part of the truth, but because it aids us in the hearing the good news of *life and mercy and love*. Just because the tragic side of life is real, Jesus shed tears.

And finally, in the remainder of the chapter, after what has been read today, we learn that this miracle, this sign, caused such concern among the Pharisees and the chief priests that they sought an opportunity to kill him, which seems an excessive punishment for the crime of raising somebody to life after they had died.

Most of the time I am astonished that Jesus was considered so much of a threat to the religious and political authorities of his day. Politicians are notoriously unnerved by threats to their power. But why did they see Jesus as a threat, so much so that they took a miraculous resuscitation as a capital offense, deserving of death?

To be sure they were steeped in the chaos of their lives which seems most important while it is happening, when we are in the middle of it, in whatever historical time it is, in whatever place. Even though we are told that it is passing away.

In their situation, Jesus *could* have been raising up an army, even though he wasn't. They saw the possibility that he might steal away from them what they didn't really have in the first place, which was earthly standing and power and security. Anyway, if they did have something, through the passage of time they would be destined to lose it. "The crazy passing," as Frederick Buechner put it, "of what they thought would never pass."

All three of these features of the story are given in the context of the resuscitation itself, which is the main

story. It is probably not necessary to say it again, but we will anyway, the Raising of Lazarus deals directly with the issue of mortality. It is relevant for us because *we face it*. In spite of all the effort and money spent to avoid it, none can escape.

In the Gospel of John, it is the 7th sign. It is the last thing that happens before the sequence of events that leads to Jesus' own death; the plot to kill him, the anointing by Mary at Bethany, the entry into Jerusalem, the supper with his friends, the predictions of betrayal and denial, and on through to the end of the story. The story of Jesus deals directly with the issue of mortality.

If one denies the threats, the good news is less relevant and meaningful. Just because *that* is the situation in which we are found, there is sadness, not a desperate sadness but powerful enough to catch Jesus, and reveal the depths of his compassion.

In Mark's gospel, there is a brief statement that transitions into his account of the Feeding of the 5,000 that seems worthy of a mention here. It reads this way;

"So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place, but many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, *he had compassion on them*, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." Aren't we all?

Something like that was happening at the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus saw the human predicament and in letting it sink in, cried real tears at all the different ways the mess of our humanity finds expression.

Part of the Lenten observance is to confront us with that predicament, and to learn how to take seriously our need for Redemption, that we might know more fully and experience more joyfully the miracle of Easter, and to know more richly the love and grace of God in the living of our lives.

And let it shape not only not only our character but our self-understanding; to be more compassionate and courageous than we have previously been.

And remember one last thing: we are not called to think or feel our way through life, but to trust our way, in the Holy Name of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Genesis 6:9 - 9:17

This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. 11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. 12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So make yourself an ark of cypress[c] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. 15 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. 16 Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. 17 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. 19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. 20 Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. 21 You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them." 22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

7 The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, 3 and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. 4 Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made." 5 And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him. 6 Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, 9 male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth. 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. 13 On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. 14 They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. 15 Pairs

of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. 16 The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the Lord shut him in.

17 For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. 18 The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. 19 They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. 20 The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. 21 Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. 22 Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. 23 Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

24 The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.

2 Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. 3 The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, 4 and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to

rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5 The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

6 After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark 7 and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. 9 But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. 10 He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. 11 When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. 12 He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

13 By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. 14 By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.

17 Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

18 So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 All the animals and all the

creatures that move along the ground and all the birds —everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though[i] every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

22 “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

God’s Covenant With Noah

9 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. 2 The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands.

3 Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

4 “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

6 “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him:

9 “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

17 So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

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