



He cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go."

Most of us are familiar with some famous church bulletin bloopers and announcement. None of these were ever made at St. Martin's I assure you since we have a great parish secretary, Genny Mitchell, who corrects the pastor's frequent written mistakes. Here are a few I found online:

- 1. The evangelization committee has enlisted 25 visitors to make calls on people who are not afflicted with any church.*
- 2. Low Self-Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 to 8:30p.m. Please use the back door.*
- 3. Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.*
- 4. At the evening service, tonight, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?". Come early and listen to our choir practice.*
- 5. Potluck supper: prayer and medication to follow.*

Although I rarely tend to name my sermons, I did get a kick of some titles I recently viewed: *You're So Vain, You Probably Think This Psalm is About You; Submarine Christians--those who surface Christmas and Easter! Get Off Your ... Donkey: The Story of the Good Samaritan.* My all-time favorite, now this is supposedly a true one, was a church sign that read: Morning Sermon: *Jesus Walks on Water*; Evening Sermon: *Searching for Jesus.*

I wonder what would be catch sermon title for today's Gospel about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. How about: *Back Again!* or *Jesus beats Death in Overtime.* I might suggest: *Lazarus sues Jesus.* I'll explain that in a bit.

This Gospel speaks of one of the most amazing moments in history. I have heard my friend Father John McGowan, who was with us yesterday for our parish assembly, say in a sermon: *Jesus loved to go to the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus after for a rest. Our Lord like to sit in a recliner, have a nice chilled Manhattan and watch the Jet game, since they were the most abandoned people in need of God.* I like this image. Although Jesus loved everyone, he, like all of us, had friends. The home of Lazarus and his sisters was outside of Jerusalem and it is cleared that Jesus often went there to rest and relax. Jesus was fully human and needed friends. I remember as a young priest becoming good friends with a married couple in Erie, and I felt very much at home in their house. Whenever I would visit, Tom, the husband would get me a nice cold bottle of beer. I would then sit with him and his wife Diane and talk and watch television. One time I showed up and one of their sons, Matthew, who was two at the time, ran away when I said *Hello*. Diane told me not to feel bad-Matthew was just being shy. A minute later, true story, he came out of the kitchen with a beer and handed it to me. Now that was being at home! Jesus was very much at home with this family as we read of in the Gospels.

Our Lord loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus in a very special way. We recall from another Gospel, Martha complaining to Jesus about Mary just sitting and listening to Jesus when Martha wanted her to help with the cooking. Jesus is away when he hears Lazarus is sick. By the time Jesus gets to the home, Lazarus is dead and buried for four days. Listen to Martha's words when she Jesus shows up: *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.* Martha is a woman who speaks her mind. She is upset that Jesus did not come sooner. *If you had been here...* Still, she is respectful and believes in Jesus: *I know whatever you ask of God He will give you.* I think that such a response as hers is often our reaction to the loss of a loved one. We are upset and even question God. Yet, in spite of our terrible pain, we struggle to trust and believe in the promise of eternal life. There is a bit of Martha in all of us. Death, even though we believe in the Resurrection and Heaven, is so very hard to accept. It can be so shattering and produce a myriad of feelings.

Martha questions Jesus even when our Lord tells us that Lazarus will rise from the dead. Even though she speaks of the resurrection and eternal life, she thinks it is impossible for Jesus to raise a man who has been dead for four days. But he does to the great shock of everyone. We hear the words that our Lord says at the tomb: *Lazarus, come out!*" The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So, Jesus said to them, *untie him and let him go.* We are living, but are we in need of being called out of any tombs, to be unbound and set free from those areas of our spirit that may be dying or dead? Perhaps, we carry a bitterness or deep anger toward someone, a family member, a former friend, a co-worker. This resentment is killing our spirit. Perhaps, our marriage has grown cold and distant, or it may be dying or even dead. Maybe I am going through the motions in my faith. I come to Church, but do I really believe and seek to make Jesus Lord of my life, or is my soul struggling for life? We can get so captured by greed, envy, lust, jealousy that these sins bind us, control us, and rob us of our freedom. While we are not buried

in a tomb, but we all need to hear the words addressed to Lazarus in our own lives:
Come forward? Untie him/her!

I mentioned at the beginning of the Gospel that I thought a possible title might be Lazarus sues Jesus. I was trying to get your attention, but there was a purpose to the thought. Every Wednesday evening before supper, the three priests here at St. Martin's read the Sunday readings together and discuss them from our own views, not so much on how to preach them but rather what they mean to each of us. Perhaps, it was the Holy Spirit, but we get talking about perhaps Lazarus was already in heaven, seeing God face to face. If he was, he was having a joy and happiness behind description and then was pulled back to life by the power of Christ to bring comfort to his sisters.

I have read, as I am sure many of you have, about near death experiences where a person is clinically dead. Some report actually seeing their families crying and the doctors working on their bodies. Some talk about moving toward a glorious light and deep sense of peace. Many say they did not want to come back because they were had such serenity. A few years ago, there was a best-selling book entitled *Proof of Heaven* by Doctor Eben Alexander, a brain surgeon, who was in such a deep coma for several weeks that doctors said he was all but brain dead. The X rays showed part of his brain to be dead. Alexander writes about this period as a time when he journeys in the afterlife and experience the wonders of God. Dr. Alexander who was not an overly religious person before this experience reported that he had a profound experience of the afterlife and God. My friend of mine told me a story about a friend she had who had a such a near death experience while serving in the Army in Vietnam. He told her that because of what he experienced, he would never be afraid to die.

Did Lazarus want to come back from the grave? I am kidding when I wonder about his hiring a lawyer to sue Jesus. I have been with dying people who wanted to go home to God, but also felt so torn seeing the pain in their families that made them want to stay alive. I do not know the answer as to what Lazarus felt during the time his body was in the tomb. Where was his spirit? What I am sure of is that he never again had the faintest fear of dying. Jesus is the Lord of Life.