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Expectations

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John 11:32-44

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." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 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." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 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." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus come out!" 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."

Expectations

Today is All Saints Day, the day we rejoice in those gone to God before us. We celebrate them and our loving relationships past and present as we continue to live our legacy as missional people. It is the root of our existence, based on our common heritage as followers of Jesus with covenant - like expectations.

When we think of expectations, we might assume Jesus' followers expected compassionate and healing behaviors from him. In like manner, our expectations of loving behavior are based on Jesus's life. Yet at the beginning of today's story of Lazarus, Jesus clearly failed to meet Mary and Martha's expectations.

In their minds, he was supposed to come and heal Lazarus when they sent messengers of Lazarus' illness. We know Jesus got the message, yet he did not go. Lazarus died. So when Jesus finally showed up, it was clear that Mary felt like he failed her when she said, "He would have lived if you had come." Rather than being indifferent, Jesus wept.

Now what happened next met no one's expectations. It was and is such a wild story that it probably would have been dismissed if not for the crowd of witnesses there.

It began with Jesus insisting the stone be rolled away from Lazarus' grave. For there is so little soil in that area that it is saved for planting. People are buried in natural caves and those carved from rock instead. Such a burial cave would be sealed with a huge rock to keep out animal scavengers and thieves. This is the kind of big stone Jesus asked them to move away. Martha protests, "It's been four days. He will be smelling by now!". Perhaps she was really saying, "Why bother?"

Yet they obeyed. Several young strong men went up the hill to the cave and rolled away the stone. Then Jesus yelled, "Lazarus come out!" And he does. Lazarus comes out. Not like the walking dead. Not like a flesh-eating soulless zombie. Not like Frankenstein's monster. Lazarus emerges alive, his body and mind whole and healed. From death to life, Lazarus lives.

Now there was a time in Westminster Presbyterian Church's past that we faced death as well. Death by bankruptcy when costs ran twice projections and we could not pay the bank. That was in the 1930's. The bank was ready to come and take the keys. We were to lose everything, a kind of death. Then First Presbyterian paid our debt. We would live! Later we paid this debt forward by helping found Trinity Presbyterian Church.

In later decades, we paid almost twice the projected costs of elevator and other renovations. When I came, we owed the bank approximately \$370,000 and had multiple building repairs left undone. First a hail storm replaced the flat roof that leaked every time it rained. Then we discovered we had filed tax credits on those renovations, selling them for \$100,000. In addition, we extended the capital campaign another year. All these faithful efforts together yielded results. Last year, we paid off the mortgage as we celebrated our 125th anniversary as Westminster Presbyterian Church. Like with Lazarus, God continues to help us live in unexpected ways through hope, in faith, and persistent action together.

Today we grieve those gone to God or moved closer to family. Our loss of them can feel like a death. Some wonder if we may live. Into this void we see the need to again put vision back in the driver's seat with relationships sitting next to vision in the front seat. As programs and management can only see what was and is, they will move to the back seat for they cannot drive us forward. For like Lazarus, Jesus calls us to new life through a new vision - who we will be and where we are

to go now. In winter and spring of 2016 we will prayerfully create our new vision together.

Now we have done this before. In the 1920s, Westminster Presbyterian Church sat on the corner Huntoon and College Avenue. At that time, we had a new vision. It was to be a gathering place for all ages in this new neighborhood called College Hill. So one morning, we all came to church, 700 strong, and walked from our old building on the corner of Huntoon and College to our new Community Center building at our current location at 1275 Southwest Boswell Ave across from Boswell Junior High School. For we have always been about following our vision into new mission, and that time has come again.

For times continue to change. Only a quarter of us live in the neighborhood. We are a Topekan church now. College Hill neighborhood organization comes here for monthly meetings, yet most do not consider us their church or the neighborhood gathering place. Still, God is faithful. God is with us and has new plans for us. With God's help, our new vision will bud from our deep missional roots so we might live in new ways, like Lazarus, in faith and love like the saints before us.