

Year B, November 4, 2018
All Saints
Christ Church, Mexia

Michael Green in his book, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, conveys the following story: "Dr. R.A. Torrey, founder of the Biblical Institute of Los Angeles, lost his twelve-year-old daughter in an accident. The funeral was on a rainy day. They stood beside that hole in the ground, surrounded by loved ones. It was dark and dismal. Mrs. Torrey said to her husband, 'I'm so glad that Elizabeth is not in that box.' Their grief went home with them that night as they tried to sleep.

Dr. Torrey got up in the morning and went for a walk. A wave of grief broke over him anew, the loneliness of her absence, the terrible feeling knowing they would never hear her laughter again, never see her face, never witness her growth. He couldn't take it. And he leaned against the street light and he looked up and he began to pray. This is what he experienced: 'And just then the fountain, the Holy Spirit, whom I had in my heart, broke forth with such power as I think I had never experienced before. And it was the most joyful moment I had ever known in my life! It is an unspeakably glorious thing to have within you a fountain ever springing up, springing up, springing up, ever springing up 365 days in every year, springing up under all circumstances.'

I think this story captures exactly what the gospel message this morning is telling us as we gather to remember all those saints who have gone before us, and especially Peggy and Mary Lee whom we have recently lost.

Grief is an inevitable experience for us. It is a difficult time for us. And the period of grief can last for a long time. Scripture never condemns grief, by the way. In fact, in the lesson from John this morning, we heard how Jesus was "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved" when he witnessed the grief of Mary and the Jews with her. And even Jesus wept as they were moving to the grave. God grieves with us in our time of grief.

And yes, the gospel lesson shows us that resurrection is possible. It is a precursor of what will happen to Jesus and gives us hope in everlasting life after this one. But that's not all there is to this passage.

Think about the story from the perspective of Lazarus for a minute. He is in the total darkness of the cave that is his final resting place. Not only is the sunlight blocked, but his face is covered in cloth as well. How dark must it be?

Then the stone is removed from the entrance and Jesus calls him forth into the light of day and he has the cloth removed. From the darkness of the tomb into bright sunlight – imagine that experience! One of the great themes in the gospel of John is that Jesus' "...life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Jesus calls us into the light.

Do you remember those commercials, like for Ginzu knives or rubber spread that seals the leak in your boat? But wait, there's more!

Lazarus is bound in cloth; you know, like the mummies who used to scare us in the 1940s, 50s and 60s horror movies. So even in the light, he has trouble seeing. But Jesus says, "Unbind him and let him go." Set him free.

Wouldn't you like to be free? Free of whatever is limiting you, constraining you, dragging you down? Is it depression, addiction, grief, hatred of another, self-loathing... There are so many things that bind us. And so, we need to turn to Jesus. It's never too late. The people mourning Lazarus thought it was too late, Jesus can't help now. But he did!

Today we remember and pray for those who have gone before. And that's appropriate, but let me tell you, they are praying for you too. I can't explain it, but after my surgery, I had a vision. And people may say it was the anesthesia – maybe it was a "brain on drugs.". But I believe the message! We are all connected – every one of us, whether we want to be or not, connected to God, connected to each other, to those we love and those we hate, to those we know and those we don't, to those who came before and to those who will come after us. That is the great joy for today.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.
Amen.