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Lent V, Year A
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Making Space for Resurrection

I am reminded of a Disney Pixar film entitled *Inside Out*. Much of the movie centers on the inner life of a young girl who is learning how to deal with complex emotions.

For most of her younger years, life is simple. Each memory is tied to a single emotion. Joy is the main character in those early years. Her memories are mostly happy and uncomplicated.

But one day, at the age of eleven, everything changes. Her family moves across the country just as she is about to begin middle school. Her entire world is upended. Suddenly, the memories that were once pure joy become mixed. Sadness begins to hold those memories too. When this happens, her inner world begins to fall apart.

She must learn that healing does not come by getting rid of sadness. Instead, healing begins when she stops pushing sadness away. And that is when she begins to heal.

In our own lives, healing from grief isn't about getting over what has happened. Trying to "get over" a deep sadness often just pushes it down, repressing emotions that are part of how God has made us. Like it or not, our feelings are gifts, all of them.

That doesn't mean every feeling should be acted on. But it does mean every feeling needs to be acknowledged, felt, and brought before God. When we bring those memories, those moments of grief, loss, even regret, before God, something begins to change within us.

While the past doesn't change, how we hold the memories does. We begin to let God hold those memories with us. We can feel deep sadness but not as those without hope.

Not only do we have a renewed hope for the future, but even how we see our past begins to change, not in what happened, but in how it is remembered. That is what resurrection begins to look like in our lives.

As we mature, we begin to see that healing is not about moving past grief as if it never happened. It is about learning how to carry it, learning how to hold complex emotions at the same time. Healing is really about learning how to carry joy and sadness together, with God's help.

For this reason, portions of today's Gospel lesson are often used at funeral services. This story both honors our pain and sorrow while also proclaiming the hope of resurrection life. It's not one or the other. It's both.

Today we find Mary and Martha living in that place of joy and sorrow, and even Jesus himself enters into that place.

Martha and Mary believe in Jesus. They trust in the promise of resurrection. But they are still filled with grief. Their faith does not take away their sorrow. Instead, their faith allows them to trust that sorrow and pain do not have the final word.

Ultimately, the promise of resurrection life does not erase grief. Rather, it changes how we hold our grief. And if we wonder what that looks like, what it looks like to hold grief and hope together, we can look at Jesus.

The One who is risen from the dead wept. Jesus wept. Our translations don't do this line justice. These are not just tears of sympathy. These are gut wrenching tears.

Jesus knows what he is about to do. He knows that Lazarus will be raised from the dead. He knows that resurrection is coming. And still, he weeps.

He does not rush past the grief. Instead, he allows sadness to take the lead role. Jesus makes room for Martha and Mary to bring their whole selves to him, their pain, their questions, their anger, their mixed emotions.

He does not give them a bunch of platitudes. He does not tell them to look on the bright side or try to explain their grief away in light of resurrection. Instead, he enters into their sorrow.

Ours is a God of truth but that does not mean God stands at a distance from our emotions. God does not say, get yourself together before you come to me. Instead, God says, come to me as you are, and let my love begin to make you whole.

Before there is resurrection, there are tears. Before there is new life, there is grief.

Today's lesson then takes us to the tomb. Jesus tells them to roll away the stone. The always practical Martha pipes up and says, but Lord, there is already a stench. It has been four days.

The funeral is already over. The people have gone back to their daily lives. What could Jesus possibly do now. As Martha has already pointed out, it's too late. This situation feels beyond hope. And yet, this is exactly when Jesus chooses to act.

Not before things got too bad. Not even when there was still a glimmer of hope. But right when finality has settled in, when everyone else has already given up. And it is right there, when hope seems all but lost, that Jesus begins to do something about it.

And if that is where Jesus works, then maybe the places we have given up on are not beyond his grasp after all.

Before new life emerges in today's story, before Lazarus takes a single breath, Jesus invites the village to roll away the stone and to unbind their friend Lazarus. They have a part to play too. They are not helpless bystanders.

Yes, Jesus is the one who raises the dead. But he invites others to take part in what he is about to do. While they cannot bring Lazarus back to life, they can roll away the stone and unbind him.

And not everyone is strong enough to move the stone on their own. Not everyone is strong enough to unbind the pall of death. That is why this is something done together as a community. And this is a big reason why God gave us the Church.

Fundamentally, the Church is a community that helps one another make space for God to work. The Church is made up of people who bear one another's burdens, who sit with one another in grief, who help one another roll away the stones and unbind the bandages we cannot remove alone.

Resurrection is not just something that happens to us. Resurrection is also something God is doing through us.

While we cannot make resurrection happen, we can make space for new life to emerge. Even with the promise of resurrection life, rolling away that stone is not easy. It is heavy in more ways than one.

That stone can look like fear or shame or the grief we have buried away for a long time. But Jesus asks us to trust him. Roll away the stone. Make space for what I am about to do.

In the end, this is what the season of Lent is all about, making space for God to show up so that we and the world around us may know new life.

Lent is not about trying to fix all our bad habits. It is about making space for God to fill us with his love and make us whole again.

Making space looks like being honest about our grief, about our anger, about our disappointments. It looks like naming what feels broken and beyond repair. It looks like bringing to God the parts of our lives we would rather keep behind a stone.

Before anything can change, we are invited to roll away the stone, to remove the bandages, giving God room to work. To trust that God can meet us even there, in the places we have given up on, in the places others have given up on, in the places that still feel heavy with grief.

And to trust that those are the very places where resurrection begins, where God is redeeming our past and giving us hope for the future. Even now. Amen.