

## *Sunday Sermon March 22, 2026*

*Awake, O Sleeper, Arise from the dead  
And Christ will give you life, Christ will give you life*

Powerful. Today's Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus is a powerful story. It's a long passage, but I just want to focus on two short verses. The first is just four words, and some translations reduce it to two. A simple verse that might reveal more about Jesus than anything else. "Jesus began to weep" or just "Jesus wept."

Jesus cried because of the sadness He saw in people He loved like Martha and Mary. It moved him. Jesus wept because He loved Lazarus very, very much. Jesus wept over a world where lives are cut short and people feel alone and afraid. That simple verse, "Jesus wept", tells us, perhaps more than anything else, that Jesus was fully human. Fully. He cried at the death of his friend, and He shares in our grieving as He shared in Martha's and Mary's. Jesus was fully human, and He experienced grief, just as we do.

The second verse I would lift up is near the end of today's passage. After being moved to tears, Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Jesus prays and then He says, "Lazarus, come out!" When Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead in another place in the Gospels He took her by the hand and lifted her up, but not with Lazarus. Jesus stood outside the tomb and called him. He called: "Lazarus, come out!" giving Lazarus the choice – the choice - to hear the call to new life and to respond or to ignore it, roll over and stay where he was.

Rolling over is what Jan Richardson suggests in a little reflection she wrote in The Painted Prayerbook. She writes:

*I wonder if it gave Lazarus pause. I wonder if Lazarus, stirring in his four-day tomb and beginning to feel the grave clothes weighing on his waking skin, had to take a moment to consider. When he heard that cry from beyond the threshold of his tomb; when he awoke to that voice, beloved but already growing strange to ears that had begun to settle into silence; when that command came and challenged the dead calm of the grave, did Lazarus give a thought to staying put? It cannot have been easy, feeling the pulse of life tickle at the flesh already loosening from his limbs. Was he tempted to simply roll over and turn his face toward the wall so that he could continue his slide into decay?*

*Nobody goes into the tomb to pull Lazarus out; no one crosses into his realm to haul him to this side of living. Lazarus has to choose whether he will loose himself from the hold of the grave: its hold on him, his hold on it.*

*Only when Lazarus takes a deep and deciding breath, rises, returns back across the boundary between the living and the dead: only then does Jesus say to the crowd, "Unbind him, and let him go." Not until Lazarus makes his choice does the unwinding of the shroud begin, and the grave clothes fall away.*

Richardson suggests that Lazarus had a choice, ignore Jesus' call and stay in the tomb or listen and respond and embrace new life...

I'll never forget a conversation I had with my dad more than a decade ago. My mother had died two years before, and her death was very hard on my dad. He lost not only his spouse of more than sixty years but he said, "I lost my best friend." When I was visiting him, we had a quiet moment over coffee in the morning, and I asked, "How are you doing dad?" and without hesitating he looked at me and said, "I've decided I want to live."

He went on to explain that he had been through a stage where he was not sure, not that he was going to take his life, but he felt like he was stuck in grief and sadness and just spending too much time sitting around feeling sorry for himself. He made the decision then that he wanted to live, to forge a new identity, to get out and be active and engage with people again, to serve others and give back in any way he could.

Out of the tomb of his grief and sadness into a new life. Not that he doesn't still grieve, but he's embraced new life and a new way of living. As someone once said, coping with death is one thing, coping with life is another.

Called to new life. Do we respond or turn away and stay where we are? Do we hear and respond to the call, to the offer of new life? The raising of Lazarus is a reminder, for us, that New Life happens.

New life happens when someone decides to embrace life after losing a loved one, like my dad did. Realizing that they still have life to live and gifts to offer. Out of the tomb, into new life.

New life happens for people who struggle with addiction when they choose to enter treatment and recovery and practice a new way of living. Many talk about “getting their ‘life’ back.” Indeed. Out of the tomb, unbound by substances, they live again.

New life happens for people who come out after hiding some aspect of their identity, now honest about who they are, proud of how God made them, they can live. Out of the tomb into new life.

New life happens for people diminished by illness, injury, age. Called forth from the tomb of “I can’t do what I could before” or “what others can do,” They see that there are other things, new ways of living a fulfilling life. Out of the tomb into new life.

New life happens in baptism. We will baptize little Ruby Isabelle at the 10:30/this service (this weekend). The story of Lazarus’ call into new life is a powerful way to see her baptism and to think about our own. Lazarus heeded Jesus’ call. Baptism is a call that we respond to every time we choose to live out our baptismal promises:

- To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor – every one – as ourself.

- And to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

Our baptism is an ongoing call to live as God created us to live. Baptism gives us our identity as sisters and brothers of Christ, beloved children of God, and our purpose – to make the world a better, more just and peaceful place as we follow Christ and live the Way of Love. Baptism calls us into this new and abundant life.

Two short verses in today’s Gospel – “Jesus wept” - showing us the fullness of His humanity and His sharing in our humanity. And Jesus calling Lazarus to “come out.” Reminding us that God calls us from where we are into new and abundant life. Calling us into the Way of Love.

*Awake, O Sleeper, Arise from the dead  
And Christ will give you life, Christ will give you life -Amen*