

Martha's comment to Jesus when she says "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" contains both her confidence in Jesus as a healer, and her complaint that Jesus didn't show up when they sent the message to him that Lazarus was dying. Because upon receiving the news about Lazarus' illness, Jesus remained where he was for two more days. We the readers can see that this is intentional on Jesus' part in order to show God's glory. But in this moment in time, no one understands this, and I think it is fair to say that Jesus is making a big ask of Martha, Mary and especially Lazarus. Now, there is nothing unfaithful about Martha and her sister Mary's attitudes when they in their grief ask where Jesus was. Because they believed that had Jesus had been there he would have grabbed Lazarus from the precipice of death and pulled him back to health. And Martha makes an undeniable statement of faith when she replies to Jesus saying "Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.

But the point of this story is not about Jesus saving a man from dying, but about saving him and all of creation from death. It is one thing to heal someone as Jesus does throughout this gospel, but it is an entirely different thing to wrest someone from death and call them back to the living. Lazarus is very dead at this point. His body has been laid in its tomb for the last four days and tradition at that time assumed that the soul, which would have lingered around the body for three days, would have been now departed and there was no hope of this person ever returning to the land of the living. Decay has set in and there is a stench. John's gospel wants us to understand that Lazarus has indeed gone well past the point of return, because John wants us to see the overwhelming power of God in Christ over death. This is not a story of healing, of making whole the parts that were broken. Those parts,

those broken pieces, even they are gone. No. This is a story of life emerging out of nothing. Of life breaking out of the tomb, of soiled and foul burial clothes needing to be removed, so that the life beneath them can once again see the light. And that is the glory that Jesus is talking about here at the tomb of Lazarus and what the entirety of John and all the gospels point to: that not even death can stop God. And while Martha knows this in a far away, some day kind of manner, Jesus is bringing that life she is looking for on the horizon right into the tomb where Lazarus lies and to those gathered to mourn him. Jesus is bringing life to them all in the present moment through his very self.

Now, the life that Jesus is offering in John's gospel does not entail simply being alive, but being spiritually alive—to be alive in such a way that we are able to love each other, love ourselves, love God more fully, more completely than we otherwise might do if left to our own desires. And because this is so, there is also more than one way to understand resurrection. And it is important for us to take Jesus at his word when he says resurrection in him is a very present and real thing, today. You see, salvation isn't just for that far off time in the future, something waiting for us on the horizon; salvation is something that we can know now, today. Salvation is something happening, something ongoing in our lives as we are transformed through our faith, through our being a part of the body of Christ. And so think about what that might look like. What does resurrection look like in your lives? What does new life look like for you? Or have you seen it in the lives of others?? Because it is there.

In her book, *Raising Lazarus*, the author Beth Macy writes about this kind of resurrection through the harrowing, powerful and even painful stories of the community workers in Appalachia who seek to care for those folks who have found themselves hopelessly addicted to drugs—predominantly opioids. And as

addicts they have essentially become dead to society, cut off from the world you and I might take for granted. In her first book, *Dopesick*, Macy traces the development of just how these drugs became so available through the pharmaceutical company Perdue Pharma and literally follows the path of destruction these drugs inflicted on countless communities as vulnerable people were exposed to these incredibly powerful and highly addictive pain killers. In this second installment of her research around the opioid crisis, Macy follows those in these local communities seeking to help people out of their addiction, but doing so in ways that some find controversial, but others see as the only way to help: Harm reduction. Harm reduction isn't about getting someone to quit using, not right off the bat—it can be, but is more about helping a person to approach sobriety in ways that meet them where they are and sometimes that means helping them to stay safe in their addiction, safe from overdose, from disease, from hunger, from violence. It is an approach that is fundamentally non-judgmental and sees these folks who live in impossible circumstances, in exceptionally compromised circumstances, as human beings and not just addicts. It is also a relational approach to caring for folks dealing with addiction. Those who seek to help become a part of the lives of the people they work so hard to assist.

Macy follows a pastor who does this work in North Carolina, who uses the Lazarus story to illustrate the kind of work the community is called to do in helping these folks struggling with addiction: Jesus worked the miracle in raising Lazarus, she says, but it is up to the community to undertake the “stinky, messy work of pulling off the burial shroud.” It is up to the community, just as we see in John's gospel today, to pull off the foul bindings that embraced Lazarus in the tomb so that he might again walk in the land of the living. And for those who are saved, for those who are resurrected, they are able to return to their community, they are able to

lead full lives with meaning, and many return to help others who are in exactly the same circumstances they once found themselves in.

We have had some really wonderful presentations in the last couple of weeks during our faith forum hour on the outreach that we do here at St. Peter's. And it seems that many of our ministries, perhaps especially our many feeding ministries, welcome people dealing with addiction and all the challenges that brings with it. And we do it without judgement, with authentic hospitality, and with faith. I know, because I've seen you do it. And it is not just good for the people we serve, but good for us too. For one person's resurrection is our resurrection as well. Not just as individuals, but as a community. We are all connected and when one is suffering, the whole body is diminished.

But more can be done, more needs to be done. Addiction, hunger, poverty, these are just symptoms of a larger issue: that our community is in need of care both material and spiritual. The Pentagon wants 200 billion more for this war with Iran. Now, I do not consider myself a pacifist, but I am a pragmatist and if we are willing to spend this kind of money of destruction, what could we spend in order to build up our community? What would we need to help ensure people have all that they need to be whole? According to Mother Jones here are some things 200 billion would cover:

2.8 million public school [teacher salaries](#)

4 years of a fully-funded [National Institutes of Health](#)

200 years of [free New York City buses](#)

6.6 years of fully funded [school lunches for every public school student](#) in America

3 years of [dental coverage](#), finally included in Medicare Part B

4,347 [birthday parades](#), road repairs included

1.4 years worth of annual [ACA subsidies](#)

90 percent of Americans' roughly \$220 billion in [medical debt](#)

10 years of [paid family leave](#) funding

It is not just about cash, it is about a community making a choice on where to put its resources. To fund what it loves. And when a community can do this, can care for its most vulnerable members, it is also a community that can get into the graves of people and be willing to pull them out, to unbind them from their wrappings and welcome them back to life. We are a people who believe that God is in the grave just as God is everywhere else, and we are called to that space too, and to act so as not to let death have the last word.

Like Mary and Martha, we say that if only Jesus had been here our brothers and sisters would not have died. But Jesus is here, salvation is happening all around us, new life is coming at us. Perhaps a better question would be to ask, where are we?