

“Lazarus, Come out!”

There are two people named Lazarus in the Gospels. The one is the blessed subject of a parable told by Jesus. The other is the blessed object of a miracle done by Jesus. There is much that is similar about them even beyond their common name, so much so that we might suppose that the two are really almost one.

But there is this difference. The one lies on the ground - a beggar in the dirt, unnoticed at the gate of the rich man - and then dies. The other dies and then is buried in the ground - hidden in the grave for four days. But, then, both are raised up - the one into the bosom of Abraham, the other into the company of his family and friends, among whom is Jesus himself.

What does it all come down to? Simply this. The love of God compels us to love one another where we are - on the ground and even out of the ground, as it were. We are raised up and called out of ourselves. We are set in motion towards others.

When we ignore the stranger in our midst or neglect the beggar at our door, then we deny the God who became poor for our sakes, who came into our midst, and who comes knocking at the door of our hearts. When we are consumed by envy at the good fortune of others, when we are filled with hatred and wrath for the hurts and injuries inflicted upon us, whether real or imagined, then we place ourselves very far from God and do great harm to others as well as to ourselves.

To put it in terms of the parable, there is a great gulf fixed between us and God when we ignore the poor man at our gate, the neighbour close at hand, and our loved ones all around. Then we place ourselves in torment, the torment of our self-willed distance from God. Then we are pretty far gone - like Lazarus in the ground four days; *“behold, he stinketh”*, Martha says, and so do we in the sins of our indifference and self-involvement. But Jesus says, *“Lazarus, come out.”*

The problem is not that we don't know better. The problem is that we do not act upon what we do know. The vision of love is not alive in us because we do not let it live in us. We are dead to the glory of God revealed: *“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”* Yet Christ *is* risen from the dead - he raises Lazarus as the illustration of the teaching that he is the Resurrection and the Life, as the sign which points to the real and ultimate Resurrection, Christ's Resurrection from the death of all our sins.

He would have us come out of our sin and death and into the communion of his love and life. The vision of love is our life with God, wherever the places and whatever the circumstances of our lives. We are called into his love, wherever we are.

The vision of love revealed gives shape to all that we see and do, to all that we hear and read. The love that is of God is far more than sentimental feelings; it is the deep yearning of the soul, at once seeking understanding and striving for articulation but also compelled to the cross and to the service of others. It is the love which Jesus shows us and into which he calls us. He is "*the Lord of the dance.*"

Each morning in Chapel, we engage in a kind of dance, a dance of the soul, a dance for the mind, a dance for the understanding. We struggle to let the images of the Scriptures, especially of the Old Testament in *The Books of Genesis* and *Exodus*, dance in our minds. What does it mean? It means to enter into the understanding of these images and stories and to appreciate what it is that they have to say. Whether or not you personally identify with these stories and the stories of the New Testament in the Christian understanding of them, they nonetheless belong to a moral and intellectual universe of which we are all very much a part, either in rejection or in affirmation.

The point in a way is to let these images play in our minds in the integrity of the understanding which they present. At the very least, it is to encounter a way of understanding and living that connects honestly with other ways and, for that matter, with other religions, even the religion of atheistic secular humanism. But we can only do so through these images in their integrity and in the fullness of their understanding.

What will not do is to empty the images of God and humanity of their spiritual integrity into a kind of amorphous no-name religion which is no religion and has nothing to say to the fearful emptiness of contemporary culture.

There is a great fearfulness in our own age and culture. It goes beyond the ceaseless spectacle of a world of wars that is constantly before us in such things as the current conflicts in the Balkans. It concerns the emptiness within the soul of a culture when it can no longer say what it is that is worth living for, when it can no longer identify the principles and the ideals that dignify our humanity.

When we can no longer say what makes life worth living for, and mean something more than merely the pragmatic hedonism of a materialistic culture, then there is certainly nothing worth dying for either. We can give no account of the sacrifices that were made for us in "*the Battle of the Atlantic*", for example. There is nothing to give your life to. There is only the emptiness within, a darkness inside, out of which comes such frightening and senseless acts of violence, death and self-destruction as we saw in Littleton, Colorado and then by extension in Tabor, Alberta in the death of Jason Lang. The essence of such acts is their meaninglessness born out of a sense of the nothingness within souls and within the soul of our culture. This is our fearfulness, the fearfulness we have to

confront and overcome.

We confront it in the Gospels. Jesus confronts our fearfulness. The Gospel of the Resurrection is especially about his overcoming of our fearfulness. The message of the angel to the women, coming early to the tomb and finding it empty, was first *"be not affrighted."* Jesus comes into the midst of the disciples, whether they are huddled behind closed doors in fear or on the road to Emmaus in flight from Jerusalem in fear.

His presence is the counter to our fears. The fear of death and the greater fear of the empty nothingness of life itself are countered by the Risen Christ. He shows us his hands and his side. He makes visible his victory over our death and the ways of death that we choose in our will to nothingness. The meaning of death has been changed and we have only to will what we have been given to see in the witness of the Resurrection. And we can only do that by the same means as it been accomplished - by the grace of God.

The Resurrection sets us in motion - to God and to one another. It makes life worth living - to know we have an end in God and that his life in us is the measure and the truth of our own lives and our freedom. We can only live for one another when we live to God. At issue is not simply *'what is it right to do'* but more importantly *'what is it good to be.'* Our morality becomes an empty morality without that deeper and religious sense of identity.

To let these images play in our souls is to find that we have gifts and talents like Bezalel and Oholiab *"in whom the Lord has put ability and intelligence"*(Exodus 36.1); gifts and talents that are to be used to the glory of God and for the good of one another. It means to will what is made known in the parable of Lazarus and Dives (Luke 16.19-end), that our love and concern for one another is born out of the love of God. To let these images play in our minds is to enter into the dance of the resurrection and to find that there are things worth living for, things which ennoble and dignify our humanity, for we are called out of ourselves. And then, perhaps, something like the ancient prayer, the *"In Paradisum"*, shall be said of us at the end of our days:

Into the Paradise of God may the Angels lead thee; and at thy coming may the Martyrs receive thee, and take thee into the holy City Jerusalem. May all the Choirs of Angels welcome thee; and with Lazarus once a beggar, may God grant thee rest eternal.

We are called out of ourselves and into the fullness of these images and their understanding.

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