

**John 11:1-45**

<sup>11</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” <sup>4</sup>But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” <sup>5</sup>Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup>after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup>Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” <sup>8</sup>The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” <sup>9</sup>Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup>But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” <sup>11</sup>After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” <sup>12</sup>The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” <sup>13</sup>Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup>For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” <sup>16</sup>Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup>She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” <sup>28</sup>When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” <sup>29</sup>And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup>When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” <sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice,

“Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

<sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. <sup>46</sup>But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done.

*Lord, we wait for you, and in your Word we trust. By the power of your Spirit, set our hearts and minds on the source of life and peace: Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*

According to John’s gospel, Jesus seemed to be aware of Lazarus’ illness and death, for he purposefully delayed going to see Mary and Martha, in order that Lazarus would be dead and buried 4 days. At first blush, this seems cruel and inhumane, yet Jesus had a clear purpose for his timing.

Indeed, after four days in the tomb there would be a stench. Lazarus was dead, *way* beyond any hope of resuscitation. Jesus was raising the stakes, for the raising of Lazarus back to life could only be explained as an act of God.

In the gospel of John, Jesus was the incarnation of the power of God. God’s power was revealed in Jesus by the signs he performed. From the perspective of the Jewish authorities, these signs became progressively more challenging. John records seven specific signs.

Jesus’ first sign was changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Other signs included the healing of a royal official’s son, and the healing of a man paralyzed for 38 years. Then there was the feeding of the 5000, followed by Jesus walking on water. By this time the news of these signs had spread and the authorities were growing more and more concerned by the number of people who were following Jesus.

The sixth sign was the healing of the man born blind; nothing like this had ever been seen! The evidence for this healing (on the Sabbath) was irrefutable. The Pharisees tried denying that the man was ever blind, but were backed into a corner when his parents provided the proof. There was nothing left for them to do except call the formerly blind man a sinner, and banish him from the synagogue.

With the final sign, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus' identification and unity with God was complete and undeniable. It left the Jewish authorities with a choice; they could accept Jesus as the long awaited Messiah, or they would have to get rid of him. They chose the latter; they chose to eliminate the source and evidence of this growing movement by killing both Jesus and Lazarus.

What the Jewish leadership missed however, was that the Jesus movement was God's doing, and thus it could not be stopped, nor could it be silenced. Is it not the same today?

What are the signs of God's activity in our midst today? How is God moving in the ministries of First Church here in the valley today? Where do we see love freely given? Where do you see deepening faith? Where do we see commitment and passion for serving our sisters and brothers? Where do you see lives being transformed? What is God building here in our midst?

***Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it, labor in vain.***  
(Psalm 127:1)

The Pharisees were blind to the living incarnation of God. They missed the new thing God was building right under their noses! We must not be blind as they were! The Gospel message is pointed and clear: even now Christ is risen and living amongst us.

As we journey these Lenten days immersed in the Gospel good news, the risen Christ is raising the stakes and challenging us to recognize the love of God moving in our midst. This holy journey is not about belonging to the right church or the right club; it's about accepting our belovedness and letting the love of God transform us.

As we move now into prayer and our celebration of Communion, let us open our hearts to the love Jesus poured out upon all people. There is a place for everyone at this table; love commands it!