

Tied Up In Knots

Fifth Sunday of Lent April 2nd 2017

A Reflection by Peggy Jensen

Prayer: Stir in us new life, Oh God. Help us to trust that you are with us in the moments of anxiety and frustration. You are with us when we grieve and face death. God, steady us in death's presence, and give us hope for a new tomorrow. Put the Spirit of life within us and teach us how to live life fully. In the name of Jesus the Christ we seek your life breathing word for us today. Amen

This story of Lazarus is very dramatic and emotional. The sisters have sent a message urging Jesus to come to their ill brother, but Jesus didn't go for many days. The sisters must have been frantic, finally Martha heard he was on his way so she rushed to meet him and told him Lazarus was already dead. You can imagine all the weeping and wailing, even when Jesus finally arrived at the tomb, crowds had gathered to mourn. The drama builds to a climax. Jesus orders the tomb opened and Lazarus emerges full of life not death! The final scene is like a Hollywood movie not real life! If only life was like that !!

Let's go through the scenes again and see how this story can connect with our story.

The first scene: Jesus friend Lazarus is very sick and Mary and Martha want Jesus to respond. Everyone is worried and anxious.

Do you ever worry about something or feel anxious about what might happen? Have you been anxious about an illness and waited for an answer? Take the strip of cloth you received when you arrived and *tie a knot, thinking about an anxiety or worry you have.*

The second scene: Jesus gets the message and apparently said "This illness does not lead to death but to God's glory so that the Son of Man may be glorified by it." So Jesus delayed going .

That sounds like an explanation after the resurrection which could explain the reason for this event. Mary and Martha are special friends of Jesus, so when their brother is ill they are sure Jesus will help. Jesus gets the message but the women get no response. Can you identify with that frustration?

In your life have you ever been frustrated by delays? Waiting for a diagnosis or test results?. Frustrated about 'the paper work' delay Have you sent an email message or even a regular letter and waited impatiently for an answer? Maybe it was a job application or government documents. We can get ourselves all tied up in knots as we wait. *Tie a knot as you think of your own experience.* We are not naturally patient people. We want answers now.

What happens when you send a message to God, a prayer and wait for an answer? We trust that God hears our prayers but usually the answer takes a while or the answer we get is not what we had expected. Isn't that what happened for Mary and Martha?

The third scene is one of darkness and death:

Martha goes to meet Jesus on the road because he is finally coming! She rushes up to him crying: “ If only you had come sooner!” If only... how many times do we use that phrase? Many of us carry regrets and blame ourselves for not doing something the right way or at the right time. We tie ourselves up with regrets, *tie more knots*

Lazarus has died and been in the tomb for four days (don't fret about the time line). The friends are weeping and grieving! Jesus gets caught up in the emotions too! We hear the phrase “**Jesus wept**” and we are reminded of the humanity of Jesus, he understood how it felt to lose a friend, to grieve for a loved one. Jesus cried for his friends; Jesus cried for all the pain and suffering in the world; Jesus weeps because of the destructive power of death in the world.

Can you identify with this sense of darkness and death? For those who have lost a loved one it sometimes feels like the grief never goes away. You learn to live with the pain and loss, but it never disappears. *Tie a knot for a grief or loss that you carry.*

Sometimes the death may not be physical, it may be the death of a hope or dream. Sometimes we can experience a spiritual death, a darkness of the soul. Maybe even a loss of trust in God. We have a hard time seeing where Jesus is in our darkest moments. Many of us find ourselves entombed in darkness and feel spiritually dead. We cry out and remember that Jesus cried too. Jesus understands our grief and is with us in the darkest moments.

The final scene is an unexpected outcome.

Jesus finally arrives and orders the stone be rolled away from the tomb! Jesus calls out: “ Hey Lazarus, come on out!” We just imagine the “dead” or not so dead man emerging from the tomb, with bands of cloth hanging off his limbs!

Imagine all your worries and troubles that tied you up in knots snapping away. Let your cloth drop to the ground, take a deep breath and let all the thoughts you tied up in knots go too! Can we let go of the limits we place on what is possible in order to embrace the limitless possibilities offered by Jesus? Do we place some binding restrictions on God possibilities? If I can't explain it then I can't believe it? Some things are beyond explanations. Sometimes a delay was for a good reason. God's time often has a reason we don't understand until later.

Remember Jesus said: “**I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live. Everyone who lives and believes will never die.**” Through faith in Jesus **death loses its power and life gains new power.**

This symbolic story of the raising of Lazarus is a sign of God's power over our spiritual death. This story teaches us about the fullness of life that is possible to all who believe in Jesus.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life!

Romans 8 reminds us: The Spirit of life dwells in you; “*If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit that dwells in you*” I also like the image of the dry bones and Ezekiel's message from God: “ *I will put my spirit within you and you shall live.*” The Spirit who dwells within us is the carrier of God's resurrection power. **Life within us is the Spirit.**

It is time for us to *untie the knots*, let go of anxiety, frustration, grief, worry, and hopelessness.

It is time to unbind ourselves and accept new life in Christ . Hear the good news from Jesus.

“ **I am the resurrection and the life.**” Thanks be to God