

Why did Jesus weep?

There is an alternative version of today's gospel that goes like this:

When Jesus was brought to the place where Lazarus was buried he cried out, roll away the stone. Then he shouted Lazarus come forth! Soon a figure wrapped in burial clothes appeared at the entrance of the cave. "Unbind him" Jesus cried. They removed the wrapping from his face and Martha said, "That's not Lazarus!"

Huh! Said Jesus, so he called out again a little louder: "Lazarus come forth". From the depths of the cave a figure emerged, wrapped in burial clothes. "Unbind him" cried Jesus. They removed the wrapping from his face and Mary cried out, "My Lord, that's not Lazarus!"

Jesus squared his shoulders and shouted even louder "Lazarus come forth." And here came a figure wrapped in burial clothes, stepping out of the cave.

"Unbind him" cried Jesus. They removed the wrapping from his face and Martha and Mary were about to speak up when Jesus said "Don't tell me, I know, that's not Lazarus either."

Now Jesus was really getting nervous. He looked up to Heaven. Then in a great commanding voice he shouted: "Lazarus Come Forth."

From out of the cave a familiar figure sauntered out, all wrapped in burial clothes.

"Unbind him" said Jesus. And when they did, a great cry rose up "It's Lazarus," the crowd shouted. "He has been raised from the dead!"

Jesus embraced his friend, and whispered into his ear "Lazarus, what happened? What took you so long?."

And Lazarus looked at Jesus, "My Lord, you commanded me to come fourth, and so I did."

And that is why today is called Come Forth Sunday – because it's the fourth Sunday of the month and it's the day when our kids come forth to lead the Scriptures and prayers and our newcomers come forth to be welcomed. Ever since we named this day, I've been wanting to tell this joke. So imagine how thrilled I was when I discovered that today we would tell the story of the Raising of Lazarus on Come 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday!

It was meant to be.

Even when Jesus gets the whole thing done in one try, it's a great story. It's a little like Easter right in the middle of Lent, with a resurrection scene that reminds us that Jesus himself will rise in a few weeks.

But I want to back up just a little bit. Because a lot happens before Jesus calls Lazarus to come forth from the tomb. As you may remember from the story, Martha, Mary and Lazarus were Jesus's best friends. He would go to their house to rest when he needed a break. Martha threw great parties, and Mary sat at his feet and listened. They lived in Bethany, which wasn't too far from Jerusalem. I mean if you were best friends with Jesus the healer, and had him over for dinner all the time, you would think that if you were in need he'd come running to help. But when Lazarus got sick, and was near death, and they called for Jesus to come, Jesus didn't come right away. He didn't arrive until after Lazarus had been dead for four days.

He could have come sooner, but he told his disciples that they were going to wait because God was going to work a great sign by raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus seems to have had it all figured out, he knew what he was going to do.

But here's what I wonder – if Jesus knew that Lazarus was going to be raised from the dead, that he himself was the Resurrection and the Life, why did he weep at Lazarus's grave? What made him cry at the death of Lazarus when he knew everything was going to be OK?

Have you ever had someone tell you to calm down because everything was going to be ok? I'm not sure that ever in the history of calming down, did anyone ever calm down because they were told to calm down. It's not that it's going to be ok is a bad promise. It's just that until everything is ok, it often hurts— whether it's a little time or long time, it hurts now. And what helps is having someone who will stay with us in that hurt until it's ok. When someone does that for us we know we are loved.

And that's what Jesus did. I think Jesus wept at the death of his friend because he loved him. He loved Lazarus, and felt deep sorrow that Lazarus had to suffer illness and death. He loved Martha and Mary, and his heart broke with their hearts, because they had watched their brother die and couldn't do anything about it. Perhaps he felt sorrow that he hadn't been there, even though he knew he was supposed to stay away to work a great miracle. But his friends needed him, and he hadn't been there. I wonder if that made him sad too? Perhaps that's why he cried. He sat with his friends and he wept with them instead of telling them to calm down that everything was going to be ok.

When the people saw Jesus crying over Lazarus' death, they said "see how much he loved him!" Jesus' tears were tears of love and loss and grief and compassion – just like any of us who lose a friend, or who weep with people who have lost those they love.

Jesus stayed with his friends in their sorrow, and he shared it and he bore it with them. And then when the moment came, Jesus did what God had sent him to do regarding Lazarus. Not just for Mary's and Martha's and Lazarus' sake, not just because they were his best friends, and they deserved special treatment. He raised Lazarus from the dead because he loves us too, and he had something very important to teach us about how God loves us.

A few weeks ago, I was at a funeral of someone that was dearly loved in our diocese. His name was Bishop Frank Griswold, and several years ago he had been the Presiding Bishop, which means he was bishop of the whole Episcopal Church.. And when he retired, he moved back to Philadelphia, and wrote

books and offered spiritual guidance and was just a great guy. I got to know him a little bit, and he helped me through some difficult times. At his funeral, Bishop Michael Curry, the current presiding bishop, preached the sermon. Bishop Curry also is an incredibly holy man and a great preacher and teacher – he preached at the wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle, if you follow the royals in England. At Frank Grizwold’s funeral, Bishop Michael Curry talked about this very story from John, about Lazarus being raised from the dead.

He reminded us that a few chapters later, at the last supper, Jesus tells his disciples “I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you because by this the world will know that you are my disciples.”

This is what Bishop Curry said:

*“The new commandment wasn’t love. Love been around a long time. ... Love wasn’t new. The new commandment was to Love as I have loved you.*

*Oh my gosh ... he wept over Lazarus and the crowd said: “see how much he loved him.” To love each other like God loves us is a world changer,” Bishop Curry said. “To love each other, to care about each other through thick and thin, on mountain top and in valley, is a game changer. To create societies and a world where every child of God is loved as child of God made in the image and likeness of the Most High God oh that’s a world changer.”*

You had to hear Bishop Curry say it. There isn’t anybody who talks about love like Bishop Michael Curry.

Accept maybe Jesus. See how Jesus loved Lazarus, they said. Love one another as I have loved you, Jesus says.

Even though Jesus knows that everything is going to be ok, Jesus stays with us in our sorrow, or our pain, or our joy, even our greatest happiness. Jesus doesn’t stand way ahead at the end of the line in Heaven waiting for us to stumble through our life toward him. He walks every step of the way with us. Because he loves us like God loves us, because he is God. And because he is human like us, he knows what every step of the way feels like. He gets us. He does not abandon us.

That’s how God loves the world. That’s how Jesus loves us. That’s how we love the same way Jesus loved -- by coming forth when Jesus calls us, so we can accompany others on that journey as well.

Now we might not come the first time, Jesus calls. And we might not show up the second time. And we might miss it the third time. But when we finally come forth, we can be assured that Jesus will be waiting for us with open arms, and with tears in his eyes. And we and everyone else will be able to see how much our God loves us.

Amen.