

So today is the fifth Sunday in Lent
 It's also the fifth "C" of the Sneak Attack of the five seas...

We began our journey with the question...
 What's more important?
 To *increase* positive thinking?
 Or to *decrease* negative thinking?

Most people see the question like a speedometer.
 100 miles an hour... positive... optimistic.
 Zero miles an hour... negative... pessimistic.

But Scientific research reveals...
 They are *not* connected. Not on the same scale...
 More like a water temperature gauge and an oil pressure gauge
 Both important... but not connected...

More positive thinking
 Is important... but it doesn't move the needle
 Less negative thinking... does.

But these days... it's not...
 Because The Sneak Attack of the Five "C" s is relentless.
 Complaining... Criticizing... Concern... Colluding...
 And finally... this week... *Catatrophizing*

Here's an example...
 I'm on my way to work. I miss the light. It's a long light.
 I will be late. I've already been warned about it.
 I'm going to get fired.
 If I lose my job... I can't pay my rent... I'll be evicted...
 I'll be homeless... a beggar... and I'll die on the street.
 You missed a light. You're not dead.

Catastrophizing is described in detail on the back cover of your bulletin

Catatrophizing

is a cognitive distortion

where individuals assume

the worst possible outcome will occur

turning minor stressors into perceived crises.

It involves irrational... exaggerated... negative thoughts

characterized by rumination... helplessness... and magnification.

Catastrophizing drives anxiety and depression, fostering intense stress.

Catastrophizing... brings us face to face... with our greatest fears

So... what's the worst thing... that can happen... to you?

Lose your ***job***... your ***friends***... your ***mate***...

your ***money***... your ***house***... how about... ***your life!***

From the beginning of time... people feared death.

Fear of death...

Has been breaking the hearts of men and women

for thousands of years

But Jesus... changed all that... ***with Hope***...

In the early church... ***Hope***... wasn't about ***going to heaven***

Hope... was ***undoing death***...

The ***resurrection*** of the ***dead***.

A corpse... even dust and ashes...

could become a living, human being once again...

That's the doctrine of the resurrection

Just look our first lesson...
 500 years before the birth of Jesus
 Ezekiel's shares his vision of the Valley of Dry Bones

So question the first Christians were asking *wasn't*
Will my soul go to heaven

It was
What will happen when Jesus returns
How will the dead be raised....

Time passed... Jesus did not return...
 and that early hope... hope of resurrection of the dead...
 passed by the wayside as well.

The concept then became...
The body dies... and when it dies... a soul separates from the body
and is reunited with God and with our ancestors.

This concept... Immortality of the soul... developed over time.

The immortality of the soul
 Isn't *in* the New Testament... *or* The Old Testament

The bible is not the authority about the immortality of the soul

Yet... Immortality of the Soul became very important for Christians.

In the New Testament... we find the metaphor for death... is sleep.

Paul in particular used the metaphor of sleep to describe this interim period.

The time between death... and the return of Jesus and then... next... the resurrection of the dead

Paul wrote

“Now is Christ risen from the dead the first fruits of them that sleep”

There is that sleep metaphor again.

It seems everybody is asleep in Christ

Jesus is now... the first fruits... the first to be awakened...

Jesus is the one... who is ***already*** resurrected from the dead.

So... New Testament death is like a sleep... a time of waiting...

A time of safe keeping... until the resurrection.

Jesus used that metaphor... the metaphor of sleep when he spoke to his friends about the death of Lazarus

Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep but I am going there to awaken him

The disciples said to him...

Lord if he has fallen asleep... he will be alright?

Jesus, however, was speaking about ***his*** death...

When we die in Christ... we will be kept safe.

This language is not about the immortality of the soul

It is about sleep and the hope of resurrection.

The *signs...* are *miracles...* filled with *paradox*
 Outsiders are actually insiders...
 and the insiders are actually outsiders.

Blind men see... what sighted men cannot see

Deaf ears are unstopped to listen... to words hearing men ignore

And the most vivid sign... the greatest of miracles... was read today

Jesus tells the people to *unbind dead Lazarus*
Unbind him and let him go

Jesus has been trying to unbind his disciples
 all along the way

Jesus has been trying to unbind them
 From the hold that
the fear of death had on their lives

But in order to get to Easter morning in this book...
 they must first walk through this graveyard and *awaken* Lazarus.

Maybe that's why the lectionary
 Gives us John's story about Lazarus... on the fifth Sunday of Lent.

It's a *story...* within *the* story...
 A *rehearsal* for what lies ahead.

A story that assures us
 There *is* a power... loose in the universe... that's stronger than death

It's the power... of *Love*

Yes... there was weeping and wailing over poor Lazarus
After all...

Death is a matter of the heart
Death is a matter for prayers
Death is a matter for tears

Death is a very difficult friend
who accompanies us along our journey

Fr. Tom Gibson... a retired episcopal priest and trusted confidant
Wrote about his personal view of death

Nothing else tempers our steel... like death
This's what *I* hope for...
And it is getting *easier* to *hope this way* as I age

I hope... I might disinterest myself... In myself...
as I approach my own death

I want to somehow withdraw from the "I"
of the self-important "me"
To whom death is supposed to happen
I want my ego... to gradually go away
So that "my" death... Is rather insignificant...
But God I pray
Let me come to you in this order:

Let me die before my children die... And not after...

Let me die *After* my work is done...
On behalf of those I love
Because... I fear for them and their sorrows

So let me tell you God...
After there is no one left
 Who I am afraid of losing
 Nor abandoning in this world

After that... and only then...
 I willingly give myself to death... to you... my God...
 Then I willingly come to you
 unbound like your friend Lazarus

And then... let the music begin
 But let's do this decently and in good order
 And oh... my friend... let's not do this too very soon.

The bargains we try to make with death...with God.

Jesus told his disciples
 A grain of wheat cannot grow... unless it dies
 That's what he said when facing his own end
 For the seed to do what it is meant to do... it must fall to the earth
 For the ego to do what it is meant to do... It too must be buried.
 and all the while it gains wisdom secretly

Jesus said...

Lazarus is dead.

For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.

Hard to imagine these two sentences coming from the mouth of Jesus

Lazarus is dead.

For your sake I am glad I was not there,

Because if I was...
 I'd have cured him
 And he would have lived
 And you would have missed
 My whole reason for being
 So yes! I'm very glad I wasn't there when Lazarus died
So that you may believe

Mary even affirmed is when she saw Jesus
Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

You see...
 NONE of Jesus' miracles
 Were about the actual miracles
 They were always about revealing the true nature of Jesus
So that you may believe

And there are lots of Miracles! The gospels record 37... 37!
 But there are more...
 Near the end of John's gospel... it reads...
***There are also many other things that Jesus did;
 if every one of them were written down,
 I suppose that the world itself
 could not contain the books that would be written.***
 And still...
 people who were there... who saw it happen...
still didn't believe

The raising of Lazarus... took place near the end of Jesus life on earth.
On his way to capture, trial, crucifixion and death
 he performed his most extraordinary miracle.
So that you may believe.

And they did...

This passage ends with this...

***Many of the Jews therefore,
who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did,
believed in him.***

Finally!

They saw Jesus bring a dead man back to life.

Pulled the stone from the tomb's door

cried out with a loud voice

Lazarus, come out!

So that everyone may believe!

That's the big story here

Believing in Jesus... is ***bigger*** than life... ***or*** death...

A ***very*** dead Lazarus... in his burial vault... ***for days!***

walked out of his tomb... ***alive!***

So that everyone may believe!

It's been nearly 2000 years since Lazarus was raised from the dead

And the people believed

And yet today... some people still don't believe

We give them the Good News... and they say...

I don't believe you.

And we shake our heads... and ask...

Well, what do you believe?

A few years ago, I presided at a funeral
A very fit middle-aged man wanted to talk

He had been severely injured in a horrific ATV crash
Thirty-seven fractures... plus a lot more damage...

He said God healed him... *quickly!*

Just a few weeks later... he was back at work!

Resumed all normal activities...

Fully recovered

The doctors were *amazed*.

Wanted to write about him in medical journals

He *believed*... He *knew* God healed it...

But he didn't know what to do about it...

So... I told him about Lazarus

How Jesus brought the dead man back to life

So that everyone may believe!

His face lit up

Suddenly he knew *why* God healed him

He could tell others about the healing power of God

So that everyone may believe

And as the Holy Spirit made it clearer to him

He pointed toward his family

They all saw it too

They can believe

They saw it happen...

Remember Jesus's final words after raising Lazarus...
After revealing to everyone there... his *divine nature*?

Unbind him and let him go!

So that everyone might believe...

And Paul's proclamation in today's epistle

***Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.
But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin,
the Spirit is life because of righteousness.***

***If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,
he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies
also through his Spirit that dwells in you.***

So what's our greatest catastrophe?
Is it like the one I mentioned earlier?

I'm on my way to work. I miss the light. It's a long light.
I will be late. I've already been warned about it.
I'm going to get fired.
If I lose my job... I can't pay my rent... I'll be evicted...
I'll be homeless... a beggar... and I'll die.

Death... may not be the worst thing that can happen...
It might actually be the best...
Because... Jesus has you covered...
Everything... Even death... is a blessing from God.

Amen.