

## THE MESSAGE

Sept 5, 2010

John 11:17-27; 38-44

The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller

*Dead?*

WOW! The story of raising Lazarus from the dead has to be the ultimate do-over. I love do-overs. Don't you?

Lazarus is dead. I mean really dead. Four days dead. Deep sorrow dead. Behind a big stone in the tomb dead. Stinky dead. And everyone assumes that Lazarus is going nowhere - except Jesus (and maybe Mary, with whom Jesus has a conversation about this situation).

Jesus has a plan. Jesus always has a plan involving God's glory. Have you noticed that when Jesus shows up, he changes everything? Nothing stays the same with Jesus. When Jesus shows up he changes everything about life and the way we live it in this world. Jesus has power over life and death and Lazarus gets the ultimate do-over.

This story raises all kinds of questions for me. I wonder how this experience changed things for Lazarus.

- \* How it impacted his life?
- \* How would he now live life differently after that experience?
- \* What do you do after something like that happens to you – after you've been raised from the dead?
- \* Does an experience like that not change the way you live, the way you love, the way you serve, the way you think, the way you work, the way you play?
- \* How does this encounter not change the way you do everything in life?

Which raises a question for us -- if we had our lives to do-over again, how would we live it?

I've pondered that question many times in many situations. Perhaps you have too! I often hear people say, and I say it too, "If I knew then what I know now. Wow, the things I would do differently."

- What would you do differently?
- What would you change?
- What would we do more of?
- What would we do less of?

Erma Bombeck, once a popular writer and a household name, answered that question in one of her printed articles by writing:

*“If I had my life to live over again ... I would have sat cross-legged on the lawn with my children and never worried about grass stains. I would have cried and laughed less while watching television, and more while watching real life. I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth. I would have burnt the pink candle that was sculptured like a rose before it melted while being stored. I would have eaten less cottage cheese and more ice cream. I would have gone to bed when I was sick, instead of pretending the Earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for a day. There would have been more I love yous, more I'm sorrys, more I'm listenings, but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute of it, look at it and really see it, try it on, live it, exhaust it, and never give that minute back until there was nothing left of it.”* So writes Erma Bombeck.

If you had your life to do-over again, how would you live it?

I like the way Abraham Lincoln put it. He said, *“And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.”*

Maybe that's what God is up to here. Maybe that's what God is up to when Jesus breathes life back into his friend, Lazarus. The power of Jesus' resurrection puts more life into our years. Jesus offers us a new life. He calls us out of death to life everyday.

Jesus gives Lazarus some mores of the life he was intended to live – more, “I love yous,” more “I'm sorrys,” more “I'm listenings,” more “I am fully living!”

Maybe this is how Lazarus lives out his new life, his second chance, his one more shot, his ultimate do-over. Maybe this is God's way of saying, “Here's what happens when the power of the resurrection of Jesus gets loose in your life: we live with more “I love yous,” more “I'm sorrys,” more “I'm listenings,” more “I am fully living!”

In John's gospel the raising of Lazarus is a turning point in Jesus' life; from here he turns towards Jerusalem. He is going there to die on the cross. This stop-over, this do-over in Bethany is a hint as to what is to come. It's one of John's many signs, many miracles of Jesus.

This is also a reminder for anyone who has ever been overwhelmed by life or by death that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord... nothing!

The story of raising Lazarus is an announcement that Jesus is Lord and Master of life and death. If Jesus can breathe life back into a dead man, there is nothing that can stop Jesus from breathing life into us for the sake of his kingdom work on earth!

I can't help but wonder how Lazarus must have lived the rest of his life, the rest of his do-over life? He must have been totally committed to Jesus -- telling others about Jesus and what Jesus did for him and the new life he now has because of Jesus.

I can hear people saying, “Lazarus – weren’t you that dead guy?”  
 “Yeah!” He would say joyfully, “I was! But now, thanks to Jesus, I live again and I have to tell you enjoy every moment of life because when it’s over – it’s over. I’ve been there. Live life to the fullest everyday!”

Jesus gave Lazarus a new life of purpose. He literally wakes up to a new reality of life in Christ. And life took on a whole new meaning. This story offers us a challenge to do the same; to view our lives through the lens of death and live with meaning and purpose.

It invites us to look at the end with awe and wonder and hope, not with fear and foreboding. It reminds us that death is coming for all of us someday but Jesus has conquered death on the cross and because he lives we too live everyday to the fullest for him.

The Lazarus story gives us a new life, a second chance, one more shot, a do-over. This story gives us an opportunity to die more than once – to die to self, as the Apostle Paul put it – to put our old life behind us and wake-up to a new life with Jesus; a life filled with adventures, renewed relationships, and ultimate purpose. In other words, it gives us a chance for more “I love yous,” more “I’m sorrys,” more “I’m listenings,” more “I am fully living!”

So, let me ask you: If today is the first day of your new life, your second chance, your one more shot, your do-over, how does that change the way you live, love, serve, think, work, play? How will you live your life differently starting today?

I can think of three ways we can live more fully in the new life Jesus offers. Consider these three questions:

**First, who needs to hear you say, “I love you”?**

If this is the first day of more “I love yous,” who is on your list? Who do you need to say “I love you” to like there’s no tomorrow: your wife, husband, son, daughter, friend... Say it because you mean it!

**Second, who needs to hear you say, “I’m sorry”?**

For some people they can’t even remember the thing that keeps them apart, yet they hold tightly to that grudge, or conflict, or issue. Others don’t want to say “I’m sorry,” because they are using that issue/that problem like a weapon to keep the hurt alive. Let it go. Let it go today. Say “I’m sorry.” Put your pride aside, and tell them you’re sorry, whoever it is: your wife, husband, son, daughter, friend. Say it like there is no tomorrow. Say it because you mean it!

**Third, who needs to hear you say, “I’m listening”?**

It’s no wonder why God gave us two ears and one mouth. So we could listen twice as much as we speak. Who needs your undivided attention today?

The next time you’re in a conversation, tell yourself to just listen. Listen to understand. When someone says “I need to talk to you,” stop and tell yourself, “I’m listening.” Say it to your wife, your husband, your son, your daughter, your friend. Just listen like there is no tomorrow!

I love you!  
I’m sorry!  
I’m listening!

As we do those things, we bring life into our relationships, a new life empowered by Jesus. He offers us a new life. He calls us out of death to life everyday.

So... if you had your life to do-over again, how would you live it? Why not start living that way today? Amen.