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St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Newton Lower Falls, MA
John 11:32-44 (All Saints)
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Unbind him and let him go.

Would if that would happen to all of us.

Would if we all could be unbound and let go.

Last week we spoke about “white knuckling it,” holding on so tightly to an outcome that we invite tension into our bodies. We think we know the best outcome for a situation and we “write the script,” demanding that reality conform to our own best laid plans.

And then it doesn't. Reality doesn't act as we say it should.

Jesus hears that his good friend Lazarus is sick, and he does exactly what every normal person in that situation. He sits on the couch for a couple days and waits to go see him. By the time he shows up, Lazarus has died. And Lazarus' sister Mary says “If you just would have...”

If you just would have gotten off the couch. If you just would have rode a donkey. If you would have just sent a carrier pigeon with a miracle in its message.

Those are dangerous words: “if you just would have.”

We demand reality to conform to our wishes rather than meeting reality as it is. Dangerous words.

I expect we will hear those words frequently over the next couple weeks and months in our nation. “If more voters would have voted.” “If she would have gone here.” “If he would have gone there.” There is a lot of anxiety right now in our nation.

I have a lot of anxiety.

I don't know what the outcome will be, but I know this: I have to meet reality day by day as it is.

"If you only would have been tested at the doctor sooner."

"If you only would have practiced your sport more."

This phrase lets us turn blame on others. Or even on ourselves.

"If only I would have gotten a little more sleep."

"If only I would have said the right thing."

We ignore reality and replace it with our wishes. After all, sometimes it's easier to focus on our wishes than on reality.

"Jesus, if only you would have been here, my brother would have died."

"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Our story last week.

These sentiments belie a belief that we shouldn't die, or that it shouldn't be now, or shouldn't be in this way.

And maybe we shouldn't.

But we do. We do.

And since we do, what does that mean for our lives? What does that mean for us now, today, where we are here and now?

It is here and now that we live. It is here and now that we love.

We must love in the here and now. We cannot love in the there and then.

If I am putting my "you shoulda woulda coulda's" onto someone, I am not loving them. I am interacting with my shoulda woulda coulda's. I am interacting with my own projections. I don't see the person in front of me, only my own projections.

The same thing goes for my projections onto myself. The idealized person that I want myself to be.

No one can blame me as much as I can. No one can kick myself for making a mistake as much as I can. No one can hold a grudge toward me as much as I can.

Why?

Because I hold an idealized projection of myself in my mind, the person I believe myself to be. And when I don't reach my own ideal, I turn blame on myself. It's easier to do that than deal with reality.

But we are not ideal people. We are real. We have to let go of the ideal we've been holding onto with white knuckles.

The projections sometimes have to die. The ideal has to die so we can resurrect in this life.

This is the Glory of God! The ideal person no longer binding you! The ideal dying so the true you can shine forth! The imagined self dying so that the graveclothes can fall away and show the real you underneath!

Lazarus! Come forth!

This doesn't mean that we don't face incredibly hard things. On the contrary, it means we face them with eyes wide open.

It means we face death itself with eyes wide open.

Death of those we love. And our own deaths, which will one day occur.

We all know the direction these mortal bodies are headed. We have a churchyard that reminds us every day of those who have gone before.

What I see every day as I work with hospice patients is that the people who have the hardest experiences are those who believe they can avert death. I see tension and struggle and pain where it doesn't need to be. I see families afraid of giving medicine that would

relieve a loved one's pain in their final moments. Each person's choice is their own, but it is hard to see pain that could have been relieved.

Approaching life as it is, eyes wide open, knowing that death is a part of the cycle of this life allows us to let go of an idealized life and face our reality as it is and love as we are.

It points us to love. It points to love that doesn't die.

Jesus wept, the shortest verse in the Bible. Two words. Jesus wept. Jesus showed his grief.

Grief is a sign of our love. Everyone shows it differently, some more outwardly and some hold grief inwardly. But it is always a sign to us of our love.

We carry our love and grief with us.

Sometimes grief is louder. Sometimes it is softer. Sometimes it is expected and sometimes it is surprising. But it doesn't go away—not fully. Because love doesn't go away. Our love will always be with us. Love will endure.

“Lord, if you would have...” No, we won't do that. Someone has died, and it is for us to grieve.

Put away what “should have been” and open up to love.

As we remember those who have died, we know that our love will not end. This is “All Souls” by May Sarton.

Did someone say that there would be an end,
an end, Oh, an end to love and mourning?
What has been once so interwoven cannot be raveled,
not the gift ungiven.
Now the dead move through all of us still glowing.
Mother and child, lover and lover mated,
are wound and bound together and enflowing.
What has been plaited cannot be unplaited--
only the strands grow richer with each loss
and memory makes kings and queens of us.
Dark into light, light into darkness, spin.
When all the birds have flown to some real haven,

we who find shelter in the warmth within,
listen and feel new-cherished, new-forgiven,
as the lost human voices speak through us and blend our complex love,
our mourning without end.

We grieve. We meet life as it is. We unbind others and ourselves. We love. And we
resurrect in this life.