



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

“THE KINGDOM OF LIFE”
5TH SUNDAY IN LENT

EZEKIEL 37:1-14

PSALM 130

ROMANS 8:6-11

JOHN 11:1-45

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY
MARCH 29, 2020

The raising of Lazarus brings us to the border of two worlds: death and life. Jesus speaks often of the kingdom of heaven and abundant life. Jesus also speaks of another kingdom and another ruler; of Satan; of the kingdom of this world¹, of everlasting death, eternal separation from God. If there are two kingdoms then there are two opposing Lords, two standards, two codes of conduct, and we have a choice of loyalties.

COVID-19 provokes anxiety and fear in all of us. The news tells us that the kingdom of death is stalking the land, and is winning over life. This gospel leads me to think and pray about what it means for us to be citizens of the Kingdom of Life in this terrible time. When Jesus calls Lazarus to walk out from his grave, this is the latest example of what Jesus has been up to all along. Jesus' teachings, healings and miracles all come to us from the kingdom of life. Every action of Jesus brings God's own life and love into this world. Jesus explains early on that those who are well have no need of a physician; he is coming for those who are sick². Jesus comes especially for those who are nearer the border with the kingdom of death, spiritually and physically. We might feel that includes our whole world right now. When Jesus gets to the border between the kingdoms of life and death, there

¹ Eg. *Matthew 5:37; Mark 4:15; Luke 22:31-32; John 18:36ff.*

² *Mark 2:17; Matthew 9:12; Luke 5:31-32*

can be a fierce struggle as Jesus fights for us against disease, against death, against evil and cruelty in all its forms. Just so we can be confident that Jesus has really lived our human life and gets our struggles, John reveals Jesus' own grief. Lazarus isn't only the subject of Jesus' most spectacular miracle to date, Lazarus is first and foremost Jesus' dear friend. Jesus weeps. Jesus shares in the full range of human experience from our side. But when Jesus steps forward to the borderland between life and death, through Jesus, Life wins.

Even when death seems total and all there is, there are actions *we* can choose every day to bring life. Actions which follow in Jesus' footsteps and belong to the kingdom of Resurrection. Even in these days, we are prudent but we don't panic. We are concerned but we don't become completely selfish. We guard our own health and that of our loved ones but we also care for and about others. It's a safe bet that for most of us right now, however in need we are there are others' worse off. So we don't buy up all the hand sanitizer in the store. We take what our household needs – our daily bread – and leave some for others. We call up our neighbor. We say our prayers morning, noon and night; we give thanks over our food. In these modest everyday ways, we live in the

kingdom of life; we are Resurrection people and we trust in God.

I hope you don't mind if I am very direct here in suggesting a practical way you can help your clergy help others, if you are blessed with continued financial resources. If you still have paid work and more than enough for your household, please consider giving a donation to the Clergy Discretionary Funds. From our Discretionary Funds we give immediate, direct and personal grant-in-aid to those in need: no cut to any middle man, no red tape, no forms to fill out, no delay, funds immediately in hand of a person in need, no deduction for administrative overheads.

Disbursements are recorded for audits but the list of recipients is kept confidential. Because of you, someone can fulfill a prescription for medications or eye glasses; or buy shoes or clothes, or groceries, or essential resources to help with their kids' distance learning, or a Life Alert system for a homebound elderly person, or a vital medical or household item. You don't know who you might be assisting. It may be a once and future neighbor in the pew, or a neighbor in your own apartment building or someone down the street. The simplest way to

strengthen our hand is by a single check payable to Rector's Discretionary Fund and the business office can then route monies to other clergy discretionary funds. Forgive me so being so direct, but I hope this is a helpful suggestion for those who are willing and able.

Thank you for joining us for worship today. We love you and we are praying for you. Stay safe, be well, and remember Whose you are. May the same God who raised Lazarus bless each of you with strength, hope and peace.

AMEN

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