

Dying to be re-membered
John 11:1-44

Good morning and greetings from FoH....

We have been marked with ashes.... We've just started out on our lenten journey...our journey with Jesus to Jerusalem...to the cross...and to the tomb. And to prepare us for the journey, the Narrative Lectionary has given us a story about death and resurrection. A dying and a rising up.

There are so many things to “come and see” in this story...a story of healing being withheld, a story about great love and deep emotions, a story about Lazarus dying that is really more about Jesus than it is about Lazarus.

As the story opens, we learn very quickly that Lazarus is someone that Jesus loves. And that Jesus also loves Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters. There is an intimacy in these relationships, the intimacy of family, of shared lives. And we hear that Lazarus is sick. Yet Jesus, he stays away.

Why would he do that? He turned water into wine for wedding guests...guests that included his mother whom he loved but the rest were unnamed. And he healed all kinds of people...strangers now walking, seeing, healed because Jesus came close. Why wouldn't he heal Lazarus? Why miracles and healings for strangers, but not for Lazarus, someone he knows and loves? Why does he, so deliberately, keep his distance?

Surely we are meant to “come and see” something other than a healing.

Jesus seems clear about what he's doing. He assures us that he's not stumbling; he's walking in the full light of day. He waited, he says when they learn that Lazarus has died, he waited so that we would trust him. He chose *not* to heal so we would trust him? His logic is anything but straightforward!

But then John's Gospel has been confusing our logic from its opening verse: "In the beginning was the word and the word became flesh." The *word* became *flesh*. In this gospel, words become flesh, and we can be born of Spirit, and rivers of living water flow out of Jesus' womb. The common logic that separates flesh from spirit and the literal from the metaphor is absolutely confounded in this Gospel.

Our logic, our reasoning says, that if Jesus loves Lazarus, *he should heal him*. But this logic is being brought into question. So if we set aside our assumptions about what we think should or shouldn't have happened, what might we see and hear? What might be revealed?

There is something here about life. About the nature of life. About being human. About human relationships and emotions. And we know from our lived experience that life...that relationships and emotions...do *not* follow logical logic!

But there's also something here about trust. Jesus keeps talking about trust...trusting him. Some translations read that we're to "believe" Jesus, or "believe *in*" him. But in a gospel where words become flesh, we need something more substantial than an intellectual thought or consent. Jesus is asking us to *give flesh* to our thinking. When we trust, we give flesh...we enact...what we believe.

Jesus continues to explain his logic: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who *trust* me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and *trusts* me will never die. Do you *trust* this?"

Yes? But what, exactly, are we trusting? We're trusting that Jesus' love will *not* heal us or keep us from dying? And. And we're trusting that, no matter what, we'll live? Again, this confuses our usual thinking; it defies our usual logic.

But notice that Jesus says, "I am the *resurrection* and the life." He doesn't say, "I am the *birth* and the life." Or, "I am the *healing* and the life." He isn't talking about a baby being

born, or about his power to heal, but about rising up. About having been laid down and standing up again. He's talking about being brought low, losing, failing...and rising up. This is about the nature of life. Jesus is teaching us the logic of life in God's Kingdom...a logic to trust. He's showing us a new logic to embody that will give us endlessly abundant lives.

And love is key to this logic. We see in this story that the love being made-flesh in Jesus isn't an easy love. It isn't love that will make everything and everyone okay. It isn't a simple emotion that fixes people or relationships. Jesus' love for Mary and Martha and Lazarus is profound, and sturdy. Jesus' love is so deep that the sight of Mary weeping moves him to tears. These aren't just tears of sadness because his beloved friend has died; these are tears of profound grief, mixed with anger and complaint.

We can imagine where some of these emotions, including anger, is coming from. This death of Lazarus is as much about Jesus' own approaching death as it is about Lazarus. After all, Jesus' death is at the center of John's Gospel. So it's not hard to imagine that these intense and overflowing emotions are related to the growing stress of his own life being threatened. If we're under an illusion that the son of God doesn't have emotions, or that they're always under control, here we watch as Jesus, the son of humanity, feels all the feelings of loss and pain and grief and dread. And anger, knowing that the emotions of those who gather to mourn today will just as quickly turn to cries for violence and death tomorrow. He knows that he will become a victim of emotions that turn with the logic of violence, a logic that demands, that requires punishment and death to make it better. Jesus understands that we human beings *trust* the logic of violence and sacrifice. We trust the logic of vengeance. We trust punishment. We trust that a death, a killing is required to make it better. That human beings keep trusting the logic of death and acting out our violence against each other...of course Jesus is upset! But the emotion that is visible to those around

him is love: “See how he loved him.” Jesus’ emotions are profound because his love is profound.

We keep watching Jesus as he cries, “Lazarus, come out!” What we are watching is the logic of love. Jesus, God’s word-made-flesh is showing us the logic of God’s love. The love of God that is made flesh in Jesus is a love that Jesus trusts. He trusts it absolutely and completely. He trusts it enough to breathe through the storm and pain of his grief, his loss, his anger. Rather than satisfying his emotions by lashing out at those around him, he lets the Spirit of God breathe into him. And love is what we see.

This is why Jesus waited. He waited because he wants us to see what the logic of love looks like. He’s showing us what is possible. And what is possible is for us to trust Jesus in the same way that Jesus trusts God, his heavenly Parent. Trusting the logic of love, Jesus is not afraid of death, or the stench of death. No matter how much it may stink, Jesus calls Lazarus to rise up. No matter the stench of violence that will surround him when he gets to Jerusalem, Jesus will keep trusting God’s logic of love. He will keep trusting the Spirit of God to breathe into him. Jesus will not be undone. He will not be persuaded by the logic of fear. His trust in Creator God’s love for him and for the world is sure. So sure that when he is laid low, when he is unjustly accused and executed, he will keep trusting the logic of love. With his body and being, his flesh and spirit, Jesus trusts the Aliveness of God.

In this story we hear what’s possible for being human, for human beings born of flesh and spirit. We are not meant to repeat the logic of rivalry and violence we see at play with Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Esau, Sarah and Hagar. The list is longer than we can name. With that logic, when emotions burn, we act out, burning those around us, even those we love. When we trust the logic of our emotions, we give flesh to out-of-control pain and anger, breaking relationships and bodies and lives. Mennonites aren’t

exempt from this logic. We may not do physical violence to each other but we have a long history of doing violence to each other's spirits.

Jesus waited to go to Bethany so that we would have a chance to see him, to see his emotions, to witness the fullness of his humanity. And what was visible, what those around him witnessed, was love. Jesus, God's word-made-flesh embodied love. From a place of deep emotional turmoil, of being brought low by the grief and pain that comes from loving and losing another, Jesus breathed in the Holy Spirit, stood up again, and gave love flesh. That's what those at the tomb saw. That's what we see.

And we need to see this. We need to see this logic that loves *through* the storm of emotions...a logic of love that breathes *through* pain and anger and hurt...a logic of love that is willing to be laid low, to lose, to fail, to die...a logic of love made possible with the breath of God's Spirit of Aliveness. Jesus asks us to trust this logic so that we too, when we lose, when we fail, when we are diminished and laid low...we too will keep breathing until the breath of the Spirit raises us up again. And love is given flesh.

It is necessary for us to see this logic of love at the beginning of Lent. Jesus needs for us to see so that we can trust God's logic as we go to Jerusalem and to the cross and to the tomb. And because we have seen it, we can trust it. And when we trust it, we can keep breathing in the breath of God's Spirit. Because we have seen it, we can trust the logic of love so that God's love will be made visible in and through us.

Friends, let us trust Jesus. Let us trust the logic of God's love and keep breathing. In a world holding its breath, caught in the logic of violence and war, our breathing will give flesh to love. In a church where we will, in spite of our best intentions, where we will hurt each other, let us keep breathing so that God's love will rise up. Wherever and however we find

ourselves being brought low, caught in storms of emotions, let us breathe, trusting the breath of the Holy Spirit to call us out and to raise us up.

May we breathe, today, trusting God's logic of love made visible in Jesus.

May it be so.