

**Lazarus, Come Out!**  
**March 26, 2023**  
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Okay, if you haven't had a chance yet to go to the QR code and find out what verse we are looking at this morning, I'll just let you in on the secret. We're going to look at John 11, verses 38 through 44. And while you're looking that up, I've got to share that I've been wrestling with this passage all week. In fact, just before Pastor John left, he came into my office and he said, "Well, how's it going, Aaron?" And I said, "Pastor John, I have rewritten this sermon three times, and I still don't like it!" He closes the door behind him, turns around and looks at me, and he says, "Well, consider. It's not for you." Right? I am so grateful to be here, you guys. I am so grateful to be at Central United Protestant Church, learning how to do this thing that is pastoring. And it is a great privilege to stand in front of you this morning and talk about God's word. So, would you stand with me as we read from John 11, starting in verse 38.

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I knew that You always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that You sent Me."

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.

Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

This is the Word of the Lord and we are grateful for it. Please be seated.

One of the privileges of my tenure as the Executive Officer for Central Washington University's ROTC program was the opportunity to take a group of cadets to the Bataan Memorial Death March on the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. In 1942, the Imperial Japanese army forced 75,000 men and women to march 65 miles through the scorching heat of the Philippine jungles. Most who stopped were killed, and those who kept going were taken prisoner under continued torture and forced labor. My great uncle Herb Johnson was one of those men and women. The memorial event was billed as more than just a marathon. And, of course, it's in honor of those who went through that ordeal, those brave men and women responsible for the defense of the Philippines. The Memorial Death March is a challenging march through high desert terrain. It's just shy of 26 and a quarter miles. In the first 6 miles, the participants will descend 328 feet before climbing 1300 feet over the next 6 miles. The remaining 14 miles descends and climbs and descends and climbs, until it comes back to its original elevation. But it's the sand that makes this course the most challenging. One participant wrote, "I've done 17 marathons--this was unreal. I wasn't prepared for the sand." And another wrote, "I

wasn't prepared for the loose sand-- many miles of this and a lot of it uphill." The sand makes every mile a grueling mile, and this is 26 miles of pure perseverance. I had five cadets who wanted to compete as a team of five, and several who wanted to compete as individuals. And they all wanted to compete together in the Military/Heavy division. And they all wanted to start together, and they all wanted to finish together. They put together a training plan and began to prepare for the event, but I knew they weren't going to be ready. They were training to run a marathon when they should have been hiking, walking hills, and covering rough and uneven terrain. They all had the strength and the drive, but none of them knew what rough terrain and sand would do to a person's feet, legs and back. Nor did they know what the terrain and sand would do to their drive and their will to keep going.

Aside from one cadet being propositioned by a prostitute at our cheap hotel, our travel to the event was uneventful. The evening before the event, there was a group of World War II Bataan Death March survivors who spoke and were available for a meet and greet. And just shy of mandating it, I encouraged our cadets to take advantage of that opportunity. This was the highlight of the trip for me: to be able to talk to the men and women who had undergone the ordeal which we were memorializing. Because they were competing in the Military/Heavy division, the cadets had to be in a full regulation military uniform and combat boots. And those boots couldn't be exchanged for any other footwear along the route. Additionally, they had to carry a minimum of 35 pounds in their packs. They were weighed in, and they knew that they would be weighed in again at the finish line. With great pomp and ceremony concluded, they set off in single file at a trot, not running and not walking, but at a pretty good pace, all smiles and excitement. All that remained for me was to wait, and wait, and wait. Teams were coming into view, finishing to the cheers of the waiting crowd, and moving off of the finish line. I had watched so many teams return, I was becoming familiar with the post-finish-line process. And still I waited, and waited, and waited.

Then I saw them coming into the final stretch. There were no smiles. There was no excitement. They were no longer encouraging one another, beyond a simple look, and their walk was more of a shamle. They were strung out and they were dragging. Those that could gathered together those who couldn't, so that they could cross the finish line together. I met them at the finish line, knowing that they needed to get through the post-race weigh-in. They were determined to just make it to a place where they could lay down, and it was all I could do to keep them from moving just the six feet past the finish line. I got them in line for the weigh-in, kept them standing, and found some fresh water and Jolly Ranchers. I had already found the spot where I knew they could crash, and I coached and prodded until they made it to the simple spot in the shade. As they took care of their feet and scarfed down some much-needed food, they slowly began to recount their ordeal. I learned that just over halfway, one of the cadets had pushed herself into a delirium and was convinced that they were selling watermelon at each of the water points. There were 12 water points along the way, and at each one she would beg her teammates for the money she needed for the watermelon, even threatening to take it from them. After each disappointment, it was everything the team could do to convince her to keep moving forward. At some points she would simply want to quit, and at others she was convinced that a truck had just arrived at the last water point with the

desired watermelons and she was going back for them. I listened and learned that they had each reached a point in which they no longer believed that they could go on, or that the cost of perseverance was no longer worth the reward. I then asked the question that had been building in my mind, because I knew what they were going to face: "When you knew you could no longer go on, what kept you going?" The young lady, so desperate for watermelon, smiled. "Sir, I wanted to quit, and I was ready to just walk off into the desert. I knew that the emergency crews at the water point would take me back, and I had even seen some people being taken back. I was going to get in at the next one. But then, I was passed. I was passed by a guy with no legs. He had prosthetic limbs, and he didn't even look tired. I couldn't stop." Every cadet just nodded in agreement. "None of us could quit after that."

I don't know what you came in with this morning. Maybe you are tired. I am. I've got a toddler. It turns out the route you anticipated through life was more grueling than you thought. You're tired of the sand and the hills, not to mention the sun is beating down on you. Every day is the same monotonous struggle to just keep going. Your job is tedious and boring and only barely pays the bills. You don't like your spouse and your spouse doesn't like you. Maybe retirement isn't what you thought. Or maybe you are the one responsible for keeping everybody in line. Despite your best efforts, the slow ones are moving too slow and the fast ones are moving too fast, as you move back and forth between them, trying to keep them together. You're tired, too. Keeping your family together, keeping your friends together, keeping your coworkers together, is proving more than you can handle while simultaneously keeping yourself together. Why? Why do we try so hard? Is it even worth it? Or maybe you're the delusional one, just trying to find the watermelon that you're sure is being handed out at each waterpoint.

What we need, and I think we need this every day, what we need is a change of perspective. In our passage this morning Lazarus, Martha and Mary's brother, had fallen ill. Naturally, Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus. By this time Jesus had already turned water to wine, healed the official's son, healed the man at the pool in Jerusalem, fed the 5000 by the Sea of Galilee, walked on water, and cured the man that was born blind. So, when they found out that their brother was ill, it was obvious they decided to let Jesus know. Surely Jesus would heal his friend Lazarus. But Jesus waited. When he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. He waited two days before departing for Judea. When Jesus arrived, Martha meets him. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." There's a tone of confidence here. But I think Martha is really at her wit's end. She has lost her brother because Jesus waited. When Jesus tells Martha, "Your brother will rise," Martha's response is, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Are you familiar with Winnie the Pooh and, specifically, Eeyore? I practiced my Eeyore voice for this: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." It's a theological statement, but I think if we put it in Eeyore's voice, we really understand where Martha is coming from. And how often are we in that place?

The statement would have been consistent with Pharisaic beliefs. Nobody would have argued, except for maybe the Sadducees, but there weren't a lot of them. It would have

been affirmed by the majority of the Jews of that time. But I don't think Martha's heart was in it. Jesus needed to change Martha's perspective. He needed Martha to understand the truth of her situation, and the truth was bigger than Martha knew. Jesus responded, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" And I love Jon Courson's paraphrase. He writes, speaking of Jesus: "You're talking theologically, Martha, but I am relating to you personally. I am the resurrection. **I am what you need right now.**" Martha's faith was failing. She needed Jesus in all of his power. "Take away the stone. Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? Lazarus, come out." And it happened. The man who died came out.

The raising of Lazarus is more than a mere miracle. It's a sign, a demonstration of Jesus' true identity as the Christ and the Son of God. Why? Why does this establish Jesus' identity? (Are you ready for this? I spent all week coming up with this!) Because being raised from the dead is an incredibly rare event. It only occurs four times in the Old Testament: Elijah's raising of the widow's son, Elisha's raising of the son of the Shunammite woman, Elijah's posthumous raising of another dead man, and when the Witch of Endor brought back Samuel to speak to King Saul. It only occurs three times in the New Testament. That it occurred seven times is astonishing, because it shouldn't happen at all. It's not supposed to occur until the last day. That was Martha's theological statement. And yet, there was Lazarus standing next to Martha. He was standing next to the man who raised Lazarus, the Son of God. Do you know, though, that Martha's theological statement is still true? It is still a theological truth that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Poor Lazarus actually had to die twice. But this simple fact that Lazarus will rise again is where I've been all week as I prepared for this morning. The thought that I have been turning over and over is that we today, those of us here, those of us who are listening online, and those of us in the Chapel, can deny the power of Jesus by relegating his action to those days to come, thereby denying His power in the immediate. But that begs the question: If resurrection is rare, and yet we ought not to deny the power of Jesus in the immediate, what does that look like? What does it look like when Jesus shows up in power in your life?

Several years ago, probably even decades (at this point, I've lost track), I was at the end of my day. And it was one of those days where I just wanted to go home and kill something. Don't judge me! I worked with rough people back then. I had one of those days in which all I wanted to do was go home and play a video game. I wanted to vent my frustrations or engage in some activity so remote from what I was doing that I could just unplug from reality. It was how I unwind. Unfortunately, a friend of mine was moving out of his apartment and needed some help cleaning. He was asking for help from anyone who was willing, and I gave some weak excuse as to why I couldn't help. But between leaving work and getting home, the Spirit had been working on my heart and telling me I needed to go clean that apartment. I got home; I shared that with my wife. I said, "Honey, all I want to do is play a video game, and I think the Spirit is telling me I need to go and help my friend." She's so much more charismatic than I am, so she said, "Yeah, you probably ought to listen to the Spirit." And so I went, and we cleaned. It only took us about an hour, maybe an hour and a half. And when we were done, he slapped

me on the shoulder and said, "I think I think we'll get the cleaning deposit back." Now, he was a bachelor who lived alone with his dog. It wasn't the cleanest of apartments, and it turned out there were only two of us who had agreed to help. But I owned a rental property, and I knew he was not going to get his cleaning deposit back. And it was in that moment the Spirit spoke again and said, "Aaron, clean it right." And so, I drove home to get the good cleaning supplies. My wife said, "What's going on?" And I'm like, "I don't know. I just gotta clean it right." I went back. We pulled the carpet away from the walls and pulled all the dog hair out and other dog stuff. We pulled the refrigerator away from the wall; we pulled the stove away from the wall. And be honest: Do you know what you would find if you pulled yours out right now? It was a mess. By the time we were done, I smelled like strong cleaning solution, sweat, and dog. And I said, "Yup, I think you'll get your cleaning deposit." I went home. My wife said, "What happened?" I said, "I don't know, but I'm out of time. I don't have time to play a video game. I got to go to bed. Tomorrow is coming." My friend took a new job several months later and moved away. I hadn't heard from him for two or three years, when all of a sudden I get a call: "Aaron, can we meet?" I said, "Sure." "Can we meet for coffee?" I said, "Doubly sure!" And I sat down, and he said, "Aaron, I just wanted to let you know that I have accepted Jesus as my Savior." And I said, "Why did you want to tell me that?" And he said, "Aaron, you're the only real Christian that I know." I said, "Well, how did you know that I was a Christian? He said, "You remember that day you cleaned my apartment? That was the day I knew."

Here's the crux of it: Wasn't I the witness of a resurrection? Every one of us was once dead in the trespasses and sin in which we once walked. And this man was, too, the man who was saved because a follower of the Son of God cared just enough to ensure he got his cleaning deposit. I know that only Jesus saves; I know that there was probably more to his decision than me cleaning his apartment. And yet you cannot deny that my obedience was used in a powerful way. In chapter 22 of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is confronted by those Sadducees who don't believe in the resurrection now. And they asked him a question: "If a man dies, and he has no kids, and his wife goes to his brother, and he dies, and he has no kids, and his wife goes to his brother, and she dies, whose wife is she in the hereafter?" It was based on a Levitical law that was designed to preserve an inheritance, but it was being used to show the craziness of a resurrection. "Whose wife is she going to be in the next life?" And Jesus' response to them was that they were wrong because they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. In the resurrection life, God's power is so great that people will no longer give others or be given in marriage, as when a father gives his daughter to her groom at their wedding. It won't be necessary. Jesus' point is that when interpersonal relationships are perfected among the company of the redeemed, all human interactions will be as loving and rewarding as the best of human marriages in this life.

But we're not there yet, are we? Right now, Jesus uses the context of your relationships to express his love and raise the lost to life. And yet, we don't expect that to happen in our interactions. And yet, when it does happen, we don't recognize it for the resurrection that it is. Jesus, through you, is calling to a lost and dying world, "Come out." God's power to raise the dead is being manifest in your relationships with those around you. God's power is manifest in our love for one another, and in our love for a lost and dying

world. How often do we expect that power to show up in the immediate way? Now, I was fortunate. God had that man call me and say, "Let's meet," so that God could show me what He was doing. But I suspect most of the time He doesn't tell us what He's doing. And so, not only do we have to expect that that power is being worked in our lives, but we need to learn how to rest in it. Do you want your back and knees or whatever ails you to stop hurting? Yup, me too. Do you want to be delivered from the current dead situation you've gotten yourself stuck into? Yup, me too. Do you want a perfect relationship with your spouse? Yup, me too. Do you want a perfect relationship with your kids? Oh, man. Do you want a perfect relationship with your boss? But we're not there yet, are we? It's coming. We look around us and we see pain, discomfort, sadness, frustration. But if we look correctly, what we really see all around us are dead people who need to be raised to life and to life abundantly. Are you discouraged today? We need to change our perspective. It's not about us anymore. I want you this week to seek out the help of someone you know to be a man or a woman of God, keeping in mind that the first two or three might be duds. Find the one that is sincere and transparent. They're out there. I want you to tell them your struggle, I want you to share with them where you are, and I want you to expect God to show up in a powerful way, even if He doesn't show you what that is. Because He knows what you need. He knows where you are. He met Martha right where she was. What would our moments of discouragement look like if we shared them with one another in the anticipation of a manifestation of God's power?

Is there someone in your life who is discouraged? This week I want you to walk with that person patiently. Listening, by itself, is an encouragement; you don't even have to offer a solution. I want you to be sincere and transparent, which is the hardest part and requires a level of recklessness. You have to say, "I don't know." You have to say, "I didn't do it right, either." And, most importantly, don't be the dud. Remember. Remember all the people who walked with you and encouraged you as you were being raised from death to life. We need to be those people for one another. But don't put your confidence in yourself; put your confidence in God's power and His ability to work in and through you. Do you know that he raised Lazarus from the dead? That is the power that is at work in you. That is the power that is at work in the relationships that surround you. And for some of us, this is the hard part: We've got to put ourselves in relationships. People suck. I know. I'm one of them. But God works when we enter the lives of other people, in powerful ways. His desire is to raise them from the dead. It's not about us anymore. If we as Christians did those two things in house, our love for one another would be so evident that our very existence would scream the words of Jesus to everyone we encountered. And you know what they would scream? "Come out!"

Let's pray. Lord, we just thank You so much that You first loved us, that You loved us enough to call us by name: "Aaron, come out!" And you provided the way for us to come out. Lord, the scariest part is that You call us to be transparent to a lost and dying world. You call us to show our weaknesses so that You can show your strength and that You can raise the dead, so that the very people who have no hope can find the hope of a life more abundant than they ever imagined. You waited for Lazarus, and today You wait for us, too. Every day that You tarry is another day in which You are whispering to a lost and dying world, "Come out. Come to Me." Lord, I pray that we can take our eyes

off of ourselves, that we can put our eyes on the world and their need. And more importantly, Lord, I just pray that You would show up in our relationships in powerful ways. And from time to time, that You would show us what You're doing, so that our faith would grow and our perseverance would be absolute. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.