

**The Rev'd R. Kevin Kelly | Sermon | The Fifth Sunday in Lent A March 22, 2026**

The Gospel according to John,  
does not tell us the story  
of Jesus' birth.

Neither does it record  
his Baptism;  
it does not mention the Temptation.

And those feel like important  
parts of the story,  
but John focuses much more  
on the Incarnation -  
the Word becoming flesh -  
than he does on the birth of Jesus.

Because John doesn't mention  
these events explicitly,  
it's easy to assume he  
doesn't believe  
in the human part of Jesus,  
or he doesn't care.

Our Gospel reading today,  
however, proves otherwise.

Lord, he whom you love is ill,  
Mary and Martha send this word to Jesus.  
He whom you love -  
No one else in the Gospel  
is described this way.

Jesus then tells his disciples,  
"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep."  
Again, Jesus has never referred  
to anyone else as his friend.

It's clear that Lazarus  
is important to Jesus,  
maybe in a way that no one else is.

We don't know what it was,  
we aren't told why,  
but Lazarus and Jesus seem to have had  
a unique relationship,  
one that mattered to Jesus.

Still, Jesus waits until he is dead,

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before saying, "I am going there  
to awaken him."

On the way, even before he arrives,  
he is met first by Martha,  
and then later, by Mary,  
both of whom say the same thing -

Lord if you had been here,  
my brother would not have died.

On the surface,  
this is a plain and clear  
statement of faith.  
The exchange between  
Jesus and Martha  
bears this out.

It provides the moment for Jesus to say,  
I am the Resurrection and the Life,  
and for Martha's profession -  
Yes, Lord, I believe  
that you are the Messiah,  
the Son of God -  
that's almost the entire Gospel,  
summed up in two statements.

It's a powerful moment,  
one in which we see Jesus  
as we have throughout John's narrative -  
as the One who came into the world,  
that he might save the world,  
as the Son, who reveals  
the power and glory of the Father.

But then, something happens,  
and the story changes dramatically.

Jesus now encounters Mary,  
who repeats what her sister has just said.  
This time, though, Jesus reacts  
very differently.

Jesus sees Mary weeping,  
and John tells us,  
he is greatly disturbed in spirit,  
and deeply moved.

No promises of resurrection,  
of triumph here,  
no call for Mary to believe in him,  
nothing like that.

Mary's grief reaches a part of him,  
we never saw with Martha.  
Where you have you laid him?  
And when Mary asks Jesus  
to come with her to see,  
Jesus himself begins to weep.

This is a different kind of moment,  
but still a very powerful one.

The question of course is,  
Why? Why does Jesus weep now?  
He knows what's coming next;  
he already told his disciples  
what he was going to do.

The people around him,  
are curious as well.

See how he loved him,  
some say, but others -  
Could not he,  
who opened the eyes of the blind man,  
have kept this man from dying?

And now we see,  
the crux of this event,  
this raising of Lazarus from the dead.

It's not Jesus' statement  
about him being resurrection and life,  
nor is it Martha's confession of faith.

It's Jesus,  
seeing Mary's grief,  
and knowing,  
as the crowd just said,  
that he could have prevented  
all of it.  
He could have saved his friend.

And, I believe,  
he wanted to, very much,  
but he chose not to.

Remember what he said  
to his disciples in Galilee -  
this illness is for God's glory.

Jesus had to stay where he was;  
He has to let Lazarus die;

He has to cause Mary  
all that pain and grief,  
so that God may be glorified  
in what he does next,  
when he raises Lazarus from the dead.

And Jesus knows,  
that changes that unique relationship  
with Lazarus for ever.

Lazarus was his friend,  
not his disciple or his student,  
not his follower or his servant,

Lazarus was his friend,  
the only friend Jesus had,  
maybe the only one  
who never needed him to be  
the Son of God, until now.

That's what this moment  
costs Jesus.  
At this point, since he didn't save him,  
it would probably have been easier  
to leave him in the tomb,  
than to call him forth,  
and set what's coming into motion.

Is this why Jesus weeps openly -  
because he loved Lazarus so,  
and wanted to save him,  
but he had to let this happen instead?

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This may not look like the others  
but this is John's Temptation narrative.

Jesus could see what he wanted,  
but had to let go off,  
if he really was the Son of God,

Because he came,  
not to do his own works,  
but the works of the One  
who sent him.

Because he came,  
not to save his friend,  
but the whole world.  
That's what we see at the tomb,  
the Son of God,  
calling Lazarus to come forth,  
to come back to this life  
rather than the life that awaited him.

I wonder if, when Jesus said,  
Unbind him and let him go,  
he was talking to himself,  
as much as he was to anyone else.

In older versions of the Prayer Book,  
today was known as Passion Sunday;  
It began the two-week period,  
of Passiontide,  
in which we focus on the Passion,  
the suffering of Jesus.

There was a different Gospel  
appointed for today than what  
we just heard,  
and we now call Palm Sunday,  
the Sunday of the Passion,

But I think the old title  
still fits today.  
We see the suffering of Jesus  
on full display.  
We see the sacrifice he makes,  
now, of himself,  
before his final sacrifice on the cross,

as He gives his life,  
for the life of the world.

While it may be easy to miss,  
in the rest of this Gospel,  
Today, John shows us  
all of Jesus' humanity,  
that we might love Him all the more,  
Who laid it aside for our salvation.