

## PRACTICE RESURRECTION

John 11: 30-44

[Augsburg College Chapel, April 27, 2007]

- I've been thinking a lot recently about living in the "mean time." In our liturgical tradition, it's called "ordinary" or "common" time. In the academic tradition, it's the time when we step away from the intensity of life in the campus community and go on our breaks, on to a next phase in our education, on to a career. The question is how do remain faithful to our call, to our education, to our experience of life in community in this "mean time?"
- This morning's reading from John's gospel is the assigned text for this specific day (Friday in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week after Easter) in the Easter season, and it offers us deep insight into the challenge of living faithfully in the mean time.
- The story appears in John's gospel before the story of Jesus' passion – it clearly is meant to portend the future death and resurrection of Jesus. But because it is about someone else – in this case, Jesus' dear friend Lazarus – it also is meant to offer the early faithful (and all of us) a startling challenge about our own lives in the mean time.
- Seen through the lens of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the story of Lazarus is about how we are called out of death, out of the power and ways of the world, and into life, the power of the resurrection and God's reign.
- And it is a wrenching story...Lazarus has died prematurely; Jesus does not get to his friend's home until after he has been dead for several days (and thus the power of Jesus' healing ministry is negated); Jesus asks for the stone to be rolled away (which really grosses people out!); and then he calls Lazarus out of the tomb with this ominous summons, "Lazarus, come out!"; at which point Lazarus appears at the door of the tomb, wrapped in the grave clothes, and Jesus instructs the gathered to "Unbind him, and let him go."
- So there is great drama here, but I wonder about the story from another perspective – how do you think Lazarus feels about being called back from the grave? – John doesn't address that side of things. I wonder if this was such a happy occasion for Lazarus. He has been resting comfortably in the grave, quiet and peaceful, freed from the disease that had caused him such pain and had led to his death, and now he suddenly is jerked back to life and light, now he must come back into the life of earthly responsibilities, back into the mean time, as one who has been resurrected!
- I think we owe Lazarus a bit of empathy, at least, for the circumstances of the resurrected life, because as God's faithful people, this is our story as well. The story of the Easter season is that we, too, have been called out of the grave, out of the world's power, and into the light and life of those who know the resurrection. Now what, in God's name, do we do!?
- As we set forth for our various summer adventures, I wonder about how your experiences of the last year here at Augsburg (or the last two, three or four years) will shape who you are and what you do. I wonder how you will live in the mean time, off for summer jobs or trips, or on to a new phase in your life?
- One of the central claims of an education grounded in the belief that the most important thing we do is help you find vocational meaning or hear your call is how

the various experiences of your life – growing up in a particular family, in a particular place; belonging to a particular religious community (or not); having a certain group of friends; coming to a particular college, where you study in a particular way a particular set of topics; choosing a particular career path, and so forth – how all of these experiences are part of a narrative that has history, that has an “arc”, that has been influenced and shaped by the inter-dynamics of relationships and institutions and decisions that are all part of your vocational story. What I believe we do at Augsburg is not to tell you what your vocation should be (though sometimes we all do need advice!), but to help you make sense of your vocational story, to find the coherence in the narrative, to see the significance of the various threads of your story as they weave a life for you in the world.

- In this understanding of vocation, then, the mean time becomes especially important because it is the time when we need to take responsibility for how our story continues to unfold, even when we are away from those advisors and teachers and friends who perhaps inspired us or motivated us or supported us down this path.
- Like Lazarus, we have been called out. That may be wrenching, disorienting, frightening – but like Lazarus, we also have been unbound, freed to live as those who have been saved, resurrected. And the unbinding of Lazarus by those gathered at the tomb reminds us also that we also can count on the continuing “unbinding” that comes from a community, this community, of those gathered to witness the resurrection...God does not leave us alone in our vocational journeys in the mean time!
- Wendell Berry, in his whimsical poem, “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”, offers us an insightful juxtaposition of the life of the world vs. the life called out, and herein lies the path for life in the mean time:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,  
vacation with pay. Want more  
of everything ready-made. Be afraid  
to know your neighbors and to die.  
And you will have a window in your head.  
Not even your future will be a mystery  
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card  
and shut away in a little drawer.  
When they want you to buy something  
they will call you. When they want you  
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something  
that won't compute. Love the Lord.  
Love the world. Work for nothing.  
Take all that you have and be poor.  
Love someone who does not deserve it.  
Denounce the government and embrace  
the flag. Hope to live in that free  
republic for which it stands.  
[Give your approval to all you cannot  
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man  
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.  
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.  
Say that your main crop is the forest  
that you did not plant,  
that you will not live to harvest.  
Say that the leaves are harvested  
when they have rotted into the mold.  
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus  
that will build under the trees  
every thousand years.  
Listen to carrion - put your ear  
close, and hear the faint chattering  
of the songs that are to come.]  
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.  
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful  
though you have considered all the facts.  
[So long as women do not go cheap  
for power, please women more than men.  
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy  
a woman satisfied to bear a child?  
Will this disturb the sleep  
of a woman near to giving birth?]

Go with your love to the fields.  
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head  
in her lap. Swear allegiance  
to what is nighest your thoughts.  
As soon as the generals and the politicians  
can predict the motions of your mind,  
lose it. Leave it as a sign  
to mark the false trail, the way  
you didn't go. Be like the fox  
who makes more tracks than necessary,  
some in the wrong direction.  
Practice resurrection.

- This is what it means to live in the mean time as those who have been called out – surely we can understand why Lazarus may not have fully embraced the risen life because practicing resurrection is not easy, it is counter-cultural, it flies in the face of the world's power and authority, but it is the call we have received as God's people and God surrounds us with the Holy Spirit and the community of the faithful who join us in living as those who have witnessed the resurrection, even in the mean time!. God's reign has begun and we have been called out! Practice resurrection! Thanks be to God for you, for Augsburg College, and for the life of discipleship to Jesus the risen Christ. Amen.