The Raising of Lazarus

The Gospel we hear today, the Raising of Lazarus, is at the heart of the Christian message. Remember when Jesus asks his disciples, as some of his followers begin to drift away: “will you leave to?”

Peter replied: “Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life!”

Jesus is teaching, is offering to us now, in this liturgy, eternal life, just as he taught about it, and then acted out the message in Bethany.

We start with death.

It happens to those we love, to those Jesus loves, and it breaks our hearts. Tears flow. We look for comfort, and it doesn’t always come as fast as we would like. But for disciples of Jesus, for those who love him, and for those he loves, death isn’t eternal separation, it isn’t the end of the story. What words did Jesus use? He is asleep. I will go wake him. And he did!

What about life?

God brings us to birth. Creates us in His image. But it isn’t like making a clock, winding it up, letting it run on its own, until one day it stops. God gives us life from the moment we come into the world, until we take our last breath. God keeps our heart beating when we sleep, and wakes us every morning. God’s love for us each day IS life. The more we recognize the gift, the more alive we are. The more we cherish the gift of life, relish it, celebrate it with gratitude, the more alive we become.

After her time with Jesus at the well, the Samaritan women of a couple weeks ago had a taste of living water, and was filled with life that never dies.

Once Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man we encountered last week, he could see the world charged with God’s love, and eternal life was his.

Now to tears.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He wept at the grave of Lazarus. He weeps today. Oh, does he weep today! While life is all around us, so is evil and the power of sin. Sickness isn’t punishment, but it is a symptom in a world where sin has broken loose. Sin is like a virus. If God breathes us into life, then his son Jesus offers us an immune system.

Our relationship with Jesus protects us from the power of sin, namely, its power to lead us away from God, and away from life. When sin starts to tug us away, our relationship with Jesus offers forgiveness, draws us back, restores us to life. When physical death comes, we recover into eternal life.

That is my attempt to briefly capture one of the central messages of John’s Gospel. There are some technical words that are much more precise: realized eschatology and final eschatology. Eternal life is now – realized in our relationship with Jesus. We experience it in this life. Sin is around us, and in us, but our relationship with Christ limits the damage. The love and
forgiveness that Christ offers us continually means that, while sin can start to pull us away, grace leads us to hold on more tightly to life and love. As we repent, rather than alienate us from God, our sins/human weakness help us appreciate the need for God, his Son, and the Spirit, more and more.

Jesus called forth the beloved Lazarus, and calls forth us, his beloved, to eternal life in this world, in this body, every time we find ourselves beginning to be shut off. Roll the stone away!

One day we will fall asleep in this world, and when he wakes us, we won’t be in this body that bears a penchant for selfishness and sin any longer. He will call us into the resurrected life he now lives. Final eschatology.

Realized Eschatology – the breath of God, life, is on loan to us for a time, a gift renewed every morning.

Final Eschatology – one day life will no longer be on loan to us. It will be ours to keep.

Jesus is the resurrection (future) and the life (now).

That is the glory revealed at Bethany, the glory we celebrate in the Eucharist, the glory we will rejoice in with all the stops pulled out this Easter!