

It has been an incredible journey these last number of weeks. We began in the wilderness with Jesus, we have met Nicodemus, the Samaritan women, and man born blind and, today, we will meet Lazarus. We began this journey with Jesus looking at Lent as a time of renewal and discovery. In the characters that we have meet and the stories that we have read, we have discovered a lot about who Jesus is, what Jesus is all about and what Jesus is calling us to be a part of. I hope that these days of Lent has also been a time of renewal as we all have gained a fresh perspective on the role that our faith plays in our daily lives.

We have learned what it means for us to be born again, to not only know in our heads but to also feel in our hearts what the mission of the Messiah is – that all the world would be saved through him.

We learned about what it means to worship God in spirit and truth and how we all can be living springs of water – splashing upon others – refreshing others – giving life to those around us in the same way that we received life.

We learned a lot last week about our blind spots and how important it is for us to be open to what God is doing in our midst so that we don't miss the opportunity to see God's action. So many people have the opportunity to see God doing something but they totally miss the significance of the event because they are simply not open to experiencing God. That can happen to us as well and to the

entire church and we need to always be ready and attentive to what God might be doing so that we don't miss out when it happens.

Today we share one of the most familiar stories of the Bible, the raising of Lazarus. Yet another story that is rich in light and dark imagery – the same imagery that has been in the previous 3 stories. But this story is filled with all sorts of imagery and we could spend a month just talking about this one story. But I would like to focus our time together on one aspect of the story, the notion of what it means to be “called forth,” called out of the tomb and into a life of purpose and meaning.

On February 26<sup>th</sup> an amazing thing happened. Were you one of thousands of unsuspecting people who were suddenly faced with an unimaginable crisis on that day? Heading into your neighborhood Starbucks to get a caffeine boost, only to be met with a terrifying reality: locked doors. Starbucks had shut down.

Okay, it was only for three hours (5:30-8:30). But for some of us the mere thought that all 7100 Starbucks in North America were closed was enough to jumpstart trembling hands and throbbing heads. Not even the knowledge that Dunkin Donuts was offering 99 cent "joe" to keep up community caffeine levels was enough to calm the no-Starbucks jitters.

Why did Starbucks take a three hour coffee break? They did it so that every

Starbucks employee could experience a “calling forth” for their original purpose.

The purpose and promise that had first turned on the Starbucks phenomenon had become changed and corrupted that the company needed to call themselves forth to find their original purpose.

In the words of CEO Howard Schultz, Starbucks shut down so that it could open up to its "*first love*." Starbucks shut down to rediscover and rededicate the company to the "*love, passion, and commitment*" of the coffee experience.

Starbucks had somehow lost this love – there was a “dead spot” in their corporate life, and they needed to rediscover the life of their purpose again..

In a company memo, CEO Schultz said, "*Tomorrow evening, we will come together in an unprecedented event in our company's storied history. We will close all our U.S. company-operated stores to teach, educate, and share our love of coffee, and the art of espresso. In doing so, we will begin to elevate the Starbucks Experience for our customers. We are passionate about our coffee. And we will revisit our standards of quality that are the foundation for the trust that our customers have in our coffee and in all of us.*"

Howard Schultz insisted that this calling forth was designed to reconnect the company to the "*soul of the past*." "*This is not about training*," he insisted, "*This is about the love and compassion and commitment that we all need to have for the*

*customer.*" As a company, Starbucks realized that their mission, their purpose, needed to be resurrected – and what were they willing to do in order to reenergize and refocus themselves? Close down and restart.

I maybe stretching the metaphor a bit here, but when I read the story of the raising of Lazarus, I cannot help but think about the purpose behind why Jesus rose him from the dead? I know that there is that part of the story where Jesus tells Mary that she will see the glory of God – but I feel that there is something much greater going on here than Jesus just doing something flashy to gain the attention or the belief of those around him. If we learn anything from the miracles recorded in the Bible we learn that they are not very effective at inspiring faith – real, lasting and healthy faith anyway.

And so I really wonder what Lazarus did with the rest of his life? We are never told in the Bible what happened to him. But I must expect that whatever Lazarus did with the rest of his life must have been something befitting a man who was raised from the dead.

And that leads me to the question that I have been pondering the last week as I thought about our time together today. If there was one thing, maybe two, that we could take home with me about today's story of Lazarus – what would they be?

I would imagine that the first things would have to do with the parts of my life

that are feeling dead. What part of life feels dead to you today? Where are you experiencing a lack of life? Where are the tombs – the dead places where we are just not feeling the energy and the vitality of our faith anymore? Where in my life, right now, could I use a little resurrection power?

I'm sure that each one of us here today could identify some "dead spots" in their lives I know this because I know that I have them. There are times when there are identifiable parts of my life that are feeling dead. Really dead...dead for 4 days dead...dead like it is already starting to stink dead. These are the spots that I don't like to look at and, maybe like the disciples, I try to gloss over the point and tell myself "well they are just asleep – they will be OK." Along comes Jesus and confronts me and says it plainly – nope they're DEAD!

Just like last week we talked about our blind spots, the places in our lives where we are, for one reason or another, not seeing the work of God that is taking place all around us, so too there are dead spots, those parts of our lives that just don't feel alive anymore.

Once we identify the dead spots in our lives, or once we are able to admit that all of life is not the way that we would like it to be – what do we do with that? I guess we could just resign ourselves to thinking that its normal to feel the way that we do and we should just get used to it. I guess we could tell ourselves that there is

nothing that we can do about it so why waste time thinking about it – no one feels good about their life and themselves all the time, why should we expect anything different in our lives?

In the middle of that mental conversation, there raises up other thing that I take from this story, that is Jesus keeps telling us that those ways of thinking that I just talked about are wrong. Lazarus was dead – four days dead – tomb smelling, sealed up, bound in cloth, laid in the grave, dead. That is, until Jesus shows up – then everything changes because, as Jesus himself says, “I am the resurrection and the life – those who believe in me, even though they die will live!”

Jesus has the stone rolled away and calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Jesus created life where there is death. Jesus gives life to those who are dead. That is what Jesus does – his nature is to bring life to the those who are experiencing death.

Jesus calls Lazarus forth from the tomb and gives life to him – he tells the people to unbind him and let him go. Basically he is telling the people to take the clothes of death off of him because he is no longer dead and should not wear the clothes of death – he is alive, let him dress like an alive person and go do the stuff that alive people do!

Jesus can do the same for you and for me – in fact I believe that he is doing it right now. Jesus is calling each one of us “forth” from death into life. Each one of

us has parts of our lives that we could say are dead, or maybe “less than alive.” I don’t know what those part of your life are or look like – but I bet you do. Today, Jesus is doing the same thing for you that he did for Lazarus, he is calling us to life, calling us to be alive, bringing light into the shadowy places of our lives and letting the light of his love shine upon us in a way that empowers us to follow him and find our purpose and mission in the world.

I firmly believe that Jesus did not resurrect Lazarus as a parlor trick – he raised him for a specific purpose and that purpose was greater than just showing off. The same is true for you and me. Jesus has a purpose for us and Jesus comes into our lives so that we can discover what that purpose is and so we can get to work fulfilling that purpose in our lives. If there is anything that is going to minimize the “dead spots” in your life – it is striving to discover God’s meaning and purpose in your life. That does not mean that your going to feel “100%” 100% of the time – it doesn’t mean that you wont have down times or you will never feel depressed or confused. What all this means is that when the natural cycles and courses of life cross your pathway, you will have the knowledge and perspective to place those things in their proper place and give them their proper attention – no more and no less.

We have a wonderful opportunity here today – we have the opportunity to be

unbound from the dead spots in our lives, to cast off the clothing of the tomb and experience the freedom of Jesus' purpose in our lives. In our lives and through our lives affecting who we are and how we live each and every day of our lives.