

Sermon 2008 Lent 5

Text: John 11: 17-27

Theme: "Resurrection Difference"

I love haunted houses. The ones that are just full of shocking or demonic stuff don't amuse me, but the ones that are really creative are great. The first really creative one I ever saw was when I was about 13 at Disneyland, The Haunted Mansion, and from then on, I was hooked. Usually I am disappointed because they go for the easy scare instead of really being artistic and creative, but every once in a while I find one that I really like.

Now the question is why do I like haunted houses? Is it because my life is otherwise so dull that I need anything I can find to get my heart pumping? No, I have plenty of excitement. I have decided that I love haunted houses because I know they're not real. I love the ghosts floating around and the people coming back from the dead and evil people wandering the earth in chains because I know it's all fake. Because I know that it is all fake, I treat it like what it is...an amusement park ride not the end all and be all of life.

That is why many of us love those scary rides like JAWS at Universal Studios or Raging Bull at Six Flags. The thrill of playing with the scary or the dangerous but knowing that it's not real is a thrill. We have confidence in real life and we know that the ride will end and everything will be back to normal in a few short minutes.

You know, compared to eternal life, I bet that life on this earth will seem like an amusement park ride. It would be a shame if we had to live our whole lives based on the decisions we made as Raging Bull plummeted toward earth. For instance, I remember last time I rode Raging Bull swearing that I would never touch another piece of Italian sausage as long as I lived. Well, likewise, our actual lives are much, much longer than the short years we spend on this earth, but too often, we get all caught up in the ride and forget.

In the Gospel for today, Lazarus had died. Now earlier in the chapter, we are told that Jesus knew he was sick and waited to come to him until he had died. This was not an accident. Jesus intentionally waited four days because many Jews believed

that the soul hung around only three days after death and after four days there was no possibility for that person to come back to life. Jesus also wanted to give the Jews in Jerusalem plenty of time to get out there and see that Lazarus was dead. Then he sauntered into town to raise him from the dead.

But Martha met him on the way with a perfectly Martha phrase, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" In other words, Martha was all caught up in the ride and was missing the greater truth standing right in front of her. Remember that it was Martha who got mad before because her sister Mary was just sitting there listening to Jesus and Martha wanted help with the housework. Jesus told her then that there were more important matters to consider than the here and now.

Once again Martha is all worried about the here and now. If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But at least Martha has made progress because this time she at least acknowledges that she knows Jesus can fix what is wrong. She says,

"But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus spars with her a little, reminding her that all God's children rise on the last day and Martha concedes that there is a resurrection from the dead. But she has no real confidence in it! If she did, she wouldn't be so caught up in this current life.

See that's the thing. We say we believe in the resurrection but do we live as though we believe in the resurrection? How do we get to live as though nothing in this life is all that important? How do we get to a place where we can put pride behind us and stop worrying about someone else winning? How do we stop worrying about the mundane things of life or even the perceived important things in life? That is the resurrection difference.

When our faith is fed with God's word, the remembrance of our Baptisms and the Lord's Supper, it grows stronger and stronger. As it grows stronger, our grasp of grace becomes stronger as well and the resurrection begins to become the reality for us and all the stuff in this life begins to become like a funhouse ride.

Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus. He did not weep because Lazarus had died. That was no big deal for him to fix. He wept because he looked around and all these people were destroyed with sorrow. They were not getting it. You and I do have to be destroyed with sorrow anymore because our future is secure. What happens in this world is like a trip through the haunted house or a ride on Raging Bull, it is not what really matters. It is only what precedes our real life with God in paradise.

So, regardless of the tragedy, before you crumple into a puddle remember the resurrection. Before you start yelling at Jesus, "Where were you Lord?" remember that he has already been here. Everything is fixed. No trauma in this life will endure. No tragedy in this life will last. The ride will come to an end. And at the end of the ride, some people may get off and say, "Wow that was incredible!" And others may say "That was horrible" and either way it won't much matter because the ride is over and paradise has begun. AMEN