

Meeting the Master ... In a Stone Cold Tomb

Sterling UMC
April 10, 2011
John 11
Dramatic Monologue Sermon

It was dark and damp and eerily cold. A strange sound broke the deafening silence. I gasped as air filled my lungs. From the bottom of my feet to the top of my head I felt a strange tingling sensation. Warmth began to flood over my stiff cold body. My eyes popped open. The blinding light hurt. The brightness seared my eyes. I recoiled from the painful brilliance.

“Where am I?” I wondered. What was this place of darkness with light blazing through the doorway? Why were these clothes wrapped around me? And that smell. What was that awful stench? Was I in a dream or a nightmare?

Then I began to remember. I was ill. My fever rose and I saw only blackness. How long had I been asleep? A day, a week, a year, an eternity? Time seemed to have stopped.

Then suddenly I heard my name. “Lazarus, come out!” Come out? Come out of what? I was being summoned into the burning light. What was going on? And that voice. I knew that voice. Where had I heard that voice that was calling me out of the darkness?

I heard several other voices shouting in the distance also. “Look. Look there!” Look at what? I wondered. I dragged myself upright. I turned and shuffled directly toward the light.

As my eyes gradually began to adjust to the light, I could see indistinct shapes and blurred forms, like mirages shimmering on the horizon. I heard the voices of women. They also were vaguely familiar.

Then one shape began to come into focus. A man standing apart from the crowd. His silhouette was familiar. I began walking toward him. Slow. Stiff. People were all around. They turned their heads and covered their noses as I approached. What is wrong with them? Why were they acting this way? Then I suddenly was aware of the smell myself. The putrid odor was coming from me!

Then another startling realization dawned upon my dulled senses. I was covered in grave clothes. My flesh was rotting. I reeked of death. Am I dead? I wondered.

I remembered the burning fever. I remember my sister Martha weeping and saying, “He is dying.” I remember her crying out, “Where is Jesus? Someone go find Jesus! We need him. Where is he? Our brother is slipping away.” I must have died! But that is impossible. Was I in a tomb? I don’t remember being placed there. How can this be?

It was all too much for me to take in. I was overwhelmed with ... Joy? Confusion? Wonder? Fear? Yes. All of these and more. Words can not capture the emotions I felt.

Was I really alive? I tried to remember what life felt like. To live is to see, to smell, to walk, to touch, to feel. I tried to speak, but I could not. Something was wrapped around my jaw keeping my mouth closed. I tried to unwrap the clothes binding

me but I could not. I felt the blood coursing through my veins. I could hear myself breathing. I could feel my heart beating in my chest. "I am really alive!" I was called out of death's darkness by the voice of ... Jesus. Suddenly I could see him. Yes, it was Jesus' voice that called me out of a ... tomb. I met the Master in a stone cold tomb. I was dead and now I am alive again!

All kinds of questions burned within me. Why did Jesus do it? Why was the darkness of death disturbed by the light of life? Why do I deserve a second chance? One life is all that God allots mortals. Why me? I wanted to ask him, but he was busy speaking to the astonished crowd. I took a step toward them and they cowered. They looked as if they had seen a spirit. "Am I a spirit?" No. I could feel my flesh. I moved my leaden legs as if I had awakened from a long sleep.

Suddenly two women came running toward me holding the hem of their robes over their noses like masks. I could only see their eyes. But as they got closer I realized that I knew those eyes. Mary! Martha! I tried to speak their names, but my jaw was still bound. I tried to embrace them but they recoiled. Even they could not stand the stench. I too, would have fled from the odor if I could.

Then I heard Jesus speak again. He gave a command. "Unbind him and let him go." At Jesus' command they sprang to my aid. Mary grabbed for the head napkin as Martha grasped a loose end of one of the strips of cloth and began to pull it away. I wanted to speak. "Hurry up and get me out of this mess!" I fumbled with the cloth around my jaw and felt it loosen. My sisters started unwrapping my grave clothes. And then suddenly I was free. I could move. I could walk. I could run. I could jump. I could talk. I could shout!

I was dead, but now I am alive again! Here are the grave clothes. Jesus spoke the word and life flooded into my lifeless body. Later that day when things settled down a little I began to ask my sisters about what had happened.

Martha said that I was very sick. My fever was uncontrollable. I was slipping in and out of consciousness. They knew from experience that things weren't good. There wasn't much hope. So they did the only thing they knew left to do. They sent for Jesus. But Jesus didn't come right away. And by the time Jesus got here, I was dead and buried and in the grave for four days. When Jesus finally showed up Mary and Martha ran out to meet him and they poured out their grief: "He's gone. We've lost him." Martha sobbed. "O Lord, if only you had been here, our brother would not have died." There was hurt in her words. Hurt and disappointment. The one man who could have made a difference didn't, and Martha wanted to know why.

Then Jesus said the strangest thing. He said to her, "Your brother will rise and live again." Martha immediately answered, "I know that he will rise and live again in the resurrection on the last day." And Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and life. Those who believe in me will have life even after they die. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." And then he confronted her directly and asked, "Martha do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Many others of my family and friends had gathered and in their deep sorrow, they begin to weep over their loss and my death. Mary told me that then Jesus did a very interesting thing. He wept. Jesus wept with them. Then in something that astonished the entire crowd Jesus walked over to the cave-like tomb where my lifeless body had been laid and he said to the men standing close by: "Roll back the stone!" Martha,

always the realist and ever ready to speak out, protested: "But Lord, we can't do that. He has been in the grave for 4 days. By now there will be a terrible odor." And she was right. But Jesus said to her: "Martha, only believe and you will see the power of God."

So they rolled the stone away, and Jesus cried out in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!" And incredibly, miraculously, amazingly, before their very eyes... I, Lazarus emerged from the tomb, alive. And I stand before you today as living, breathing proof of Jesus' miraculous power, a power so awesome that even death; life's greatest enemy cowers in its presence.

I am a living, walking, talking testimony of the power of my Lord, Jesus Christ. And as I stand before you today there are two things I want to leave with you.

And the first is this: Jesus wept with those He loved, and He still does. He hurts when we hurt. He feels our pain. We all face suffering some time and when it comes, one thing we can know is that our Lord is hurting with us, and He will love us through it. He will walk through the valley with us and in His time He will bring us out of the valley of the shadow of death and sorrow to the mountaintop on the other side. I know that when you face death He will be with you. When like my sisters you stand by the grave of those you love with tears streaming down your face, Jesus will weep with you. He will comfort you with His presence and His power. Jesus wept with those he loved and he still does.

Secondly, Jesus raised people up to new life, and He still does. He raised me up and brought me out of the tomb. "Lazarus, come forth," he said. See how personal this is! He called me by name. Now, if you will listen real carefully this morning, I bet you can hear him calling your name. He has a resurrection for you. He wants to bring you out of that tomb (whatever it is) that is imprisoning you.

Maybe today you feel like you are a dead man walking. All the joy of life has been drained from your soul and spirit. It's like you are in a cave of darkness and depression. Maybe you feel rotten with sin. Maybe you are buried in a tomb of despair and disappointment. Maybe you feel like everything is decaying around you. You're surrounded by the stench of death.

I am here to bear witness to the fact that you don't have to go on living like that. If that's you then you are not really living. You need the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. If you listen He is calling your name. He is calling you out of the pit of death and despair and wants to give you your life back again. He wants to unbind you from all of the grave clothes and free you to walk and to run and to live a brand new life. And he has the power to do it. If you will hear his call and respond in faith, he will raise you up and give you a new start, a new chance, a new life.

I, Lazarus was given a second chance at life and this time it will be different for me. Before Jesus was my friend. Now He is my Savior. I know that one day I will face death again. But I do not face it in fear. I know that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. I know that He who believes in Him even though he dies, he will live. And I believe in Him. Do you?