

**Jesus Calls into the Darkness**  
**John 11:1-45; Psalm 130**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**Psalm 130**

<sup>1</sup>Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

<sup>2</sup>LORD, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

<sup>3</sup>If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, LORD, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup>But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

<sup>5</sup>I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

<sup>6</sup>my soul waits for the LORD more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup>O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

<sup>8</sup>It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

**John 11:1-45**

<sup>1</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

<sup>2</sup>Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill.

<sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

<sup>4</sup>But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

<sup>5</sup>Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup>after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

<sup>7</sup>Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”

<sup>8</sup>The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” <sup>9</sup>Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup>But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.”

<sup>11</sup>After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.”

<sup>12</sup>The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” <sup>13</sup>Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup>For your sake, I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

<sup>16</sup>Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

<sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

<sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”

<sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

<sup>27</sup>She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

<sup>28</sup>When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”

<sup>29</sup>And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

<sup>32</sup>When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

<sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”<sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep.

<sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

<sup>37</sup>But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

<sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, “Take away the stone.”

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.”

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

<sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”

<sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

<sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth.

Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

<sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

### The Sermon

Maria Popova is a Brooklyn-based writer who collects and insightfully synthesizes knowledge and wisdom from many different fields and shares her enthusiasm for the best of what she finds in a weekly email called Brain Pickings.

Recently, speaking about the nature of our physical existence—not, for the moment, about God, or salvation, or our souls, or metaphysics, but just on the idea of our being here as living organisms—Maria Popova wrote:

“It is our biological destiny to exist—and then not.

“Each of us eventually returns their stardust to the universe, to be constellated into some other ephemeral emissary of spacetime.

“Eventually, our entire species will go the way of the dinosaurs and the dodo and the Romantics; eventually, our home star will live out its final moments in a wild spin before collapsing into a white dwarf, taking with it everything we have ever known—Beethoven’s Ode to Joy and the guillotine and the perfect Fibonacci sequence of the pine cone.”

[I had to look up the meaning of a Fibonacci sequence. It’s beautifully mathematical and it occurs in nature and it’s fascinating.]

“Meanwhile,” says Maria Popova about our biological, human lives, “in this blink of existence bookended by nothingness, we busy ourselves with survival and with searching for beauty, for truth, for assurance between the bookends.

“The feeling of that search is what we call meaning.”<sup>i</sup>

When I first became acquainted with Audrey,<sup>ii</sup> she had already been widowed for several years. During that time, in the second half of life as it were, she had reinvented herself professionally, and had established a career in which she enjoyed acclaim and respect and prosperity.

Once I had gotten to know her a little, I talked with Audrey about the time after her husband had died. She said that some time after the initial days and weeks and months, late one night she was lying in bed, in the house whose emptiness she was gradually coming to terms with.

And the thoughts just gathered in her mind, and it was so frustrating, so absurdly and unacceptably final, to have had somebody there for so long who wasn't there now, and finally, in the darkness, she just screamed—

not at anyone, not even to God; it wasn't some kind of primal therapy or moment of liberation or anything else with any kind of intention behind it.

It just had all gathered up, and in a great expression of whatever it was—rage, or whatever else it was—it all came rushing out in a shout to the heavens that echoed through the house and into God's ears and Christ's heart.

John the Baptist had been baptizing and prophesying in Bethany, and he was asked why he was baptizing if he himself wasn't the messiah or Elijah or a prophet; and he said, "Among you stands one whom you do not know."

And the next day, Jesus appeared, and John recognized him and said, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

The day after that, Jesus came by again, and two of John's disciples followed him; and when he turned and saw them, he said, "What are you looking for?"

And they said, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

And he said to them, "Come and see" (John 1:24-39).

The day after that, Jesus found Philip and invited him to follow. Philip then went to Nathanael and said, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, and it’s Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

And Nathanael said—wonderfully, in my opinion—“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

And Philip said, “Come and see.”

Later, when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, and she came to believe, and then believe in, the one who was speaking with her, she ran into the city to tell everybody, and she said to them:

“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” (John 4:5-29).

When Jesus said, “come and see,” it was an invitation to see where his life was.

When Philip said, “come and see,” it was an invitation to see that something good and holy and true and crucial to the cosmos could come out of a nowhere little town like Nazareth.

When the Samaritan woman said, “Come and see,” it was an invitation to see someone who gave every indication of being a prophet of God.

“Come and see,” to this point in John’s gospel, is an invitation to witness goodness and hope and life.

Everybody who was there, and I mean everybody, was in tears when Mary came to Jesus and knelt down at his feet and said, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

And he said to the people who had come with her, “Where have you laid him?”

And they said to him, “Come and see.”

They thought they were inviting him to see a place of death.

But in asking the question, he had given them the perfect set-up to issue back to him, and to everyone around them, an invitation to go to a place saturated in darkness and defined by death,

to come and see that even there, the presence of Jesus brings goodness and hope and life.

We are grieving some things right now, at home as we are, adapting as well as we can to a different way of being who we are, as people and as a society.

We are mourning a lot of things that are mundane and seemingly small, and some that are large and looming, all of which are interconnected.

We are all Martha and Mary right now, going through some sense of loss and grieving, along with the attendant frustrations and fears, coping with a new (if temporary) normal that doesn't feel anything like normal, wondering what the trajectories are going to be.

If we, if you, invited Jesus into your life as it is right now, saying, “Come and see,” what would you feel like you were inviting him into?

And if he invited you to take a look at your life with him in every part of it, saying, “Come and see,” what would you see? How would you see it?

Maybe, like the man who had been born blind and was given his sight, our lives may be what they are specifically “so that God’s works might be revealed in [us]” (John 9:3).

Maybe, like the Samaritan woman at the well, in the dry and burning isolation of her own self-quarantine, we will not only drink of the water Jesus gives us and never be thirsty, but will allow it to become in us a spring of water for the whole world, gushing up to eternal life (John 4:13-14).

Maybe, like Nicodemus coming to Jesus in the darkness of night, we will finally have enough light to see that God loved the world so much that God gave—gave up—yielded—God’s only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life—and that Jesus was sent into all of creation not to condemn it, but to save it (John 3).<sup>iii</sup>

Maybe, as Jesus told the disciples about Lazarus, our lives as they are, right now, no matter the circumstances, no matter what darkness—maybe this malady can be for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

“In this blink of existence..., we busy ourselves with survival and with searching for beauty, for truth, for assurance between the bookends.

“The feeling of that search is what we call meaning.”<sup>iv</sup>

What is the meaning of the gift God has given the world with your life?

And what is the meaning of the fact that Jesus calls even into the darkest corners of your experiences, your suffering, your wounds—

the little deaths that gang up on you when you are most vulnerable,  
and the agonizing and appalling losses

in response to which you can only lift your voice to the heavens  
or bury your head in the pillow, and scream?

Jesus called into the darkness, into the tomb, into the place where there was only death.

And the dead man came out.

And Jesus said, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.*

*LORD, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!*

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in God’s word I hope;*

*my soul waits for the LORD*

*more than those who watch for the morning,*

*more than those who watch for the morning.*

*O Israel, hope in the LORD!*

*For with the LORD there is steadfast love,*

*and with him is great power to redeem.*

Keith Grogg

Montreat Presbyterian Church

Montreat, NC

March 29, 2020

---

<sup>i</sup> Maria Popova, “Today, Another Universe: Jane Hirshfield’s perspectival poem of consolation by calibration; Rebecca Solnit on growing whole; transcendence in tragedy” Brain Pickings, March 22, 2020

<sup>ii</sup> The person’s name is fictionalized (it means “noble strength”) but the details are not.

<sup>iii</sup> The word translated “world” (*kosmos*) in John 3:17 is, all three times, the word for the whole cosmos, the whole created order of all possible universes—not just the “world” of the physical earth or of the human order or of our own time.

<sup>iv</sup> Popova, Brain Pickings, March 22, 2020