

**Sermon Notes – March 22, 2026**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**Holy Gospel of St. John 11: 1-45**  
**“Power Over Death”**

Liturgical wags and pundits have sometimes called the dour approach to Lent “the forty-day funeral for Jesus that He never had.” Indeed, the dimension of penitence surrounding Lent was the dominant thought that survived over centuries, proceeding from a more robust season of preparation for Easter baptism. The Revised Common Lectionary - especially in year A - has intentionally recovered the more ancient and apt baptismal-preparation-and-renewal approach to Lent. While the motifs of baptism and new birth have been appearing over the weeks of Lent, on this Sunday, resurrection itself breaks out into the open, even ahead of Holy Week.

The Orthodox feast of Lazarus Saturday (observed this year on April 4<sup>th</sup>) adds a helpful perspective on this the Sunday preceding its observance. On the eve of Palm Sunday – in other words, on this coming Saturday - Eastern churches have long celebrated Lazarus Saturday as a foretaste of Easter, even at times keeping the feast as a baptismal festival. Festive fragrant pastries known as Lazarus (“Little Lazarus's”) are served with the wrapped strips of dough invoking Lazarus's grave cloths. Some of the vegetarian requirements of Lent are relaxed for the day, to allow for what may be the fanciest of Easter eggs: caviar. Interestingly, the Orthodox also draw in the parabolic Lukan Lazarus, as if Lazarus of Bethany represents the fulfillment of the parable and the hope that the poor might indeed rise up unbound in this world and in our time.

The images embodied in the texts are vivid: dry bones rising, the unbinding of Lazarus, the stench of the body soon to be overcome by the fragrance of Mary's anointing of Jesus, the psalmic image of the depths from which we keep watch for the morning, Paul's account of death and life in our mortal bodies, and the tears of Jesus that we might regard as the form of baptismal water in this week's text. But along with these embodied signs, the words spoken are also remarkable.

There is the effective prophetic poetry of the dry bones narrative from Ezekiel - also read at the Easter Vigil. Lamar Williamson points out that the only times in the gospels that Jesus is said to have cried out with a loud voice is at Lazarus's grave (John 11: 43) and from the cross (Mark 15: 34). Note that in an earlier use of the word “tomb” (mnemeion) in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “Do not be astonished by this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice” (5: 28). At Lazarus's tomb, the hour has now come as he hears Jesus' voice. While Lazarus embodies the dramatic action, he doesn't speak. The

speaking goes especially to Martha, who has a significant theological discourse with Jesus when she receives from Him one of His great "I am" statements (11: 25). She makes a great confession of faith (11: 27), and Jesus reveals to her that resurrection is not only a future reality but is also in the present - and immediately now in her presence (11: 24-25). We too proclaim this word in the present ...every day!