

Fifth Sunday of Lent A 2023
Ezek. 37.12-14///Romans 8.8-11///John 11.1-45

→the well-known actor Jack Lemon...one of the most prolific actors of our times, playing both comic and serious roles....was once asked which performance he was most proud of in his lengthy career....and without hesitation he said...*Tuesdays with Morrie*

→he said.....in doing that movie...he learned **more** about life and death from that performance than all others...and he said....it truly helped him to prepare for his own death

→ironically Jack Lemon...died...shortly after that interview.

→I recently reread the book...*Tuesday's with Morrie*....and if you are familiar with the book or movie you might recall its story....

→it's the true story about how the author Mitch Albom would go and meet Morrie, his old college professor who was dying of Lou Gehrig's disease every Tuesday afternoon....

→at these gatherings Morrie would share his spirit for life...of loving and living to the fullest in midst of the painful process of dying....

→it's a small little book that is certainly worth your time reading and the lesson it teaches is quite inspirational...

→and I bring this up...today...because of its relation to the gospel story we just heard along with a similar theme found in the first and second readings.

→all three readings today, the our gospel in particular, focus on the same theme of death and dying...

→you might say...there has been a significant change in the way society copes with death and dying these days

→in the past, it was often common to kind of gloss over death and hide the reality of it

→growing up -- we didn't talk about death and the more we could push it aside or deny that it even happened....the better we thought we might feel...death was not something talked about openly

→we didn't even like to say the word ...death or dying...rather than say "he or she died"....we say "they passed" or "they expired"

→however today...things are different....death/grief/mourningthe dying and grieving process is talked about more openly these days....aren't they

→go to any bookstore and one of the largest sections in the store is devoted to the topic of death and dying

→likewise....our understanding of death and dying and grieving has also expanded as well.

→if anything....it has become more present today rather than being hidden or not talked about...and today's gospel speaks strongly to us about death and grief...and its meaning and significance.

→much research and study has been done in recent times to provide a different perspective in helping us understand death and dying...

→and perhaps one important insight coming forth from this research is that...when someone knows they are going to die...because of illness or circumstances...they pass through a number of different periods during this process.....they begin with a period of mourning, ...they then move into a time denial...followed by disbelief....before coming to some kind of acceptance or recognition with their situation.

→likewise---it is also apparent that bereaved families or anyone who has suffered a loss of a loved one experiences these same stages as well...

→all of us...in our own way.....need time to mourn, to grieve, and to finally accept what has taken place when a loved one has died

→and that is why counselors and therapists often discourage trying to cheer someone up, or demanding that they put aside their gloom, or pressuring them to get on with the business of life, immediately after the loss of a loved one...

→because...in addition to encouragement and support needed at the time of death...we also need time and space to mourn, grieve and accept our loss

→and that is exactly what happens in today's gospel story

→Jesus gives himself and Martha and Mary time to mourn the death of Lazarus...

→we hear that Jesus...when he found out about Lazarus being sick...he remained where he was for two days...and then after Lazarus had died...four days pass before Jesus finally arrives "*deeply disturbed, weeping and consoling*" Martha and Mary at the death of Lazarus

→[and] it is only then.....that he brings Lazarus back to life.

PAUSE

→I believe the message that Jesus teaches us today is that:..... "*death is a part of life*"

→the words and actions of Jesus in today's Gospel are really meant for us to realize that *dying is really an act of living*

→and the actions of Jesus in this story was his way of preparing the disciples for his impending death ...and also for you and me...as we also deal with death and loss throughout our lives...

PAUSE

→Lent is slowly winding down...next Sunday is Palm Sunday

→and in a certain sense....the purpose of each Lenten season and Holy Week is to allow us to face death .

---i.o.w. there is no Easter Sunday without Good Friday

---each year we commemorate the death of Christ...and we call it **GOOD** Friday...because of Easter Sunday and the hope that we have in the resurrection

PAUSE

→death IS something that will touch each of us at some time in our lives...we can't escape it....we will be touched by physical death and by the pain and suffering of loss and grief

→however.....because of our belief in Christ and our faith...we know that death is not the end of our story but rather it's a new beginning

→the beginning of a much more profound and wonderful life that has been promised to us...that is our hope...our promise and our belief

→that is the reason we are here each week...and that is why we celebrate Easter every Sunday....

→in his own words...Morrie writes:

"learn how to live well and you will learn how to die well;

--learn how to die and you will learn how to live.....and the best preparation for living a full life.....is being prepared to die...therefore pay close attention to whatever you treasure especially your relationship to God and each other"

→as we prepare to once again celebrate and recall the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, may our own experiences of death and loss be raised up by our hope of resurrection and eternal life

→and may we, like Jesus, Martha and Mary.....and like Morrie, live life with a change of heart...for all those we treasure and who continue to touch us deeply in our own daily lives.