

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Sarah Freyermuth

March 22, 2026

I wonder how Mary and Martha felt when they both declared to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Today in our Gospel, we hear that Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that their brother Lazarus is ill, and that even though Jesus loves them, he doesn't come immediately. By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days.

We hear that Martha goes out to greet Jesus first. And I can imagine that Martha is angry, even accusatory, saying “Lord if you had been there, my brother would not have died!” then pleading, “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him!” I imagine her feverishly grasping onto the faith she has in Jesus, desperate for him to make the situation right, and angry that her brother died in the first place when she believes Jesus could have—or should have—have stopped it.

And then we hear that Mary runs out to meet Jesus, that she kneels at his feet and says “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” I imagine her devastated and hopeless, so overwhelmed by her grief that she cannot do anything but make this public accusation and weep.

I think it's easy for me to imagine how Martha and Mary felt because these emotions feel very familiar to me and I know to many of us right now. I've

had conversations with so many of you about the grief and hopelessness you feel as we look around us—at war, at death, at the sheer number of innocent people forced to live in fear. So many of us are grasping onto faith, desperate for a different world, and angry at the evil we see all around us. I know I've angrily said to God, "Lord if you had been here, would all of this really be happening?"

Martha and Mary's actions here reveal two questions that are incredibly important for us to consider right now.

By stating Jesus could have saved her brother and following it up with a declaration that God will give him whatever he asks, Martha seems to be saying "I know what you *can* do, Lord. But do you really even care about our suffering?"

And on the other hand, Mary seems to have lost hope entirely. She seems to feel how the prophet Ezekiel must have felt when the spirit of the Lord set him down in the middle of a valley full of dry, dry bones. Ezekiel saw only death around him and Mary saw only the tomb where she knew her brother lay. Mary seems to be saying "What chance do I have of going on amidst this reality?"

But into this brokenness, our readings today respond to both of these questions. To the question "But do you really even care about our suffering?" our Gospel answers a resounding yes. We hear that as Mary kneels at his feet and grieves, Jesus begins to weep. Jesus weeps as he mourns the death of the one whom he loved, Jesus weeps as he witnesses the pain and

grief of Mary and the Jewish people, and Jesus weeps today as he looks around at the world and sees how many people are suffering.

And to the question “What chance do I have of going on amidst this reality?” our readings issue a powerful reframe. You see, the question that God has for Ezekiel is not about probability, it’s about possibility. God asks Ezekiel “*Can* these bones live?” God wants to know “is it possible for you to see the dry bones, the very real death that surrounds you, and still imagine that there is new life to be found?” Jesus, too, asks this of Mary and Martha, wondering if they can stare into the face of their brother’s death and still imagine that Jesus can bring resurrection and life, not in some faraway moment, but right here and now. What our readings ask from us today is audacious. And yet they ask anyway: “Can we still believe, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that new life is possible? Do we dare to believe that resurrection can happen here?”

This question is absolutely crucial because we can only work toward a new world when we can imagine that one is possible, when we can see new life amidst death, when we believe that these bones *can* live.

And so to help us with this, I’m going to invite us into an activity. I’m going to ask you all a question, and you can think on your answer for about 30 seconds or however long you need, and then I want you to find someone or a couple people near you to turn to and share your answers with one another. I’ll give a one minute warning and then call us all back together after 2-3 minutes. Alright?

The question I want you all to share with one another is this: Where have you seen resurrection in the world this week? Or put another way, where have you seen hope in the world this week?”

I'm sure there were a variety of different answers, and I honestly wish we had the time to go around and hear from everyone, because I didn't just force you out of your comfort zone to be mean, there is a reason that I asked us to do this activity. Well two reasons:

The first reason comes from something that Pastor Jason always talks about in our Basics class. He says that the reason we read the Creeds together as a community is that on a given day each of us individually might not feel sure about a certain part. Maybe [insert name] isn't feeling sure about the virgin birth, but that's fine because [insert name] is. And maybe [insert name] isn't feeling sure about the communion of Saints, but that's okay because [insert name] is. The Creeds aren't meant to be an ideological purity test; instead they're meant to be a reminder that we can hold one another in our doubts, a reminder that when one of us struggles to believe, the community believes for us. I think the same thing is true of hope. It's understandable that each of us might have days where we struggle to see hope or resurrection in the world around us. But I hope that this activity can serve as an anchor, a reminder that even when you are struggling to feel hope, you have an entire community of people who are here, willing to hold you in your doubts and asking you to hold them back. An entire community of people who are willing to commit together to hope and belief in the possibility of resurrection.

The other reason I had us do this activity is that in our readings today, God asks for more than belief. God doesn't just ask Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" God asks Ezekiel to prophesy to them. Jesus doesn't just resurrect Lazarus, he calls on Lazarus' community to "unbind him, and let him go." This radical and ridiculous hope that our readings call us toward today is not only ours to have, but it's ours to proclaim to the world. It's not only ours to have, it's ours to transform into acts that loose the chains of injustice and create the conditions for new life.

And by sharing our hopes with one another, no matter how small, we are participating in the act of imagining and proclaiming a new world into possibility. We are answering as a community a resounding "yes" to the question "*can* these bones live," not because we are naively optimistic, but because we dare to believe in a God of resurrection and new life, a God who will always overcome death. Today, we are called to imagine and proclaim that a different world is possible, and through the act of proclaiming, create the conditions for new life to flourish. May it be so. **Amen.**