

SERMON: "THE RESURRECTION & THE LIFE"

TEXT: JOHN 11:1-6, 17-45

**March 26, 2023
Fifth Sunday in Lent**

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INTRODUCTION

Any of you consider yourself normal? I think we all do.

However, wherever we were brought up, we tend to think of that as normal
Then we fall in love, visit their family for the holidays and think quietly
to ourselves... 'What is up with these people? They're not normal.'

Take Christmas for example – how they celebrate, what they eat

They don't eat turkey, or even roast beef. They eat ham ... communists
And the gifts from Santa? They're not even wrapped

"Who are these people? What have I gotten myself into?"

Throughout my ministry, I've tried to expand our definitions of normal

There are lots of very normal varieties of 'normal'

Just because someone's normal is different from yours

that doesn't make them abnormal or less than or a threat
or, in spite of my early joke, communists

That's how I approach my work on the Cedar Rights Human Rights Commission,
the NAACP, the Cedar Valley Interfaith Council and other groups.

It is how I understand my work as a follower of Jesus Christ commanded to
love my neighbor ... by respecting all the beautiful varieties of normal,
by having a big, and getting bigger, definition of what is 'normal'

When we see differences and diversity as a threat, we put barriers in the way of
the work we are commanded to do to love our neighbors. We do them harm

Think about it ... don't we all crave normality, to belong, to fit in

We want to celebrate our unique selves, our unique interests and abilities
We want to stick out in some ways. But we don't want to be left out

We all want normal lives. I've been thinking about that a whole lot these days

Who is normal? What is normal? Three things have been swirling round
in my heart and head asking questions about what is 'normal'

One – a multitude of bills in the Iowa legislature (and other state houses)

Laws that would take away the rights of LGBTQ parents and teens, ban books
and do away with the diversity offices at our three state universities, etc.

Bills already signed or on the Governor's desk or still pending
that take the many definitions of 'normal' and shrink them down

ANOTHER NORMAL DAY

Two – this scripture lesson from John and what it means that Jesus is ‘the resurrection and the life.’ Is resurrection normal ... and not just normal for the end of life, for life after death ... but for how we live our lives day in and day out ... our normal, everyday lives

And three – the beginning of the second year of war after Putin’s Russia, without provocation, invaded Ukraine. What does ‘normal’ look like for them, for the people who are living through the shadow of death that is war

I’m going to try and tie those three things together by asking you to ask yourself and keep asking yourself ... What does normal look like?

Let’s start with Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha ... their normal
They were grieving. Already missing their brother and the normal life they had together as a family. The way John tells the story they both approach Jesus to say “if you had only been here ...”
suggesting Lazarus would still be alive if Jesus got there in time

Both sisters wanted their beloved brother back ...
back to the way things were, back to normal, back to boring even
sharing the chores, sharing a meal, talking about the weather
We know that sense of sadness, of longing for what we once had

I remember when my dad was dying. He was pretty straightforward about it
He was pretty straightforward about everything. We were all together
All three boys were there. We were watching the NCAA tournament
We grew up watching Carolina basketball. My dad was a huge fan
Carolina basketball. Georgia football. That was our normal.

He said with a hopeful tone, “I just want to live long enough to see Carolina win another national championship.” My brother Josh got a little upset.
He said, “Ask for something bigger, Dad ... like Georgia winning the natty!”
The Tar Heels did win the NCAA tournament that year (2010)
The Bulldogs won the National Championship in football 11 years later.

I would have loved watching the Dawgs win with the Grey Dawg himself sitting next to me. I thought about my dad when Kelee Ringo sealed the win against Bama last year with a pick 6 interception return for a touchdown. Shed a tear. Raised a toast.

Isn’t that one of the ways we grieve. We want to have that person with us for another day, another game, another fishing trip, another piano recital another regular old Tuesday ... another normal day

RESURRECTION AS NORMAL

I think that is what Martha and Mary both wanted

And I think that is what Jesus was speaking to when he answered Martha

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

She talked about resurrection in the future 'on the last day.'

Jesus made it about today ... about our grief now, our struggles now

Jesus with his words to Martha (and us), with his death and resurrection makes resurrection now and normal ... the new normal!

What exactly does it mean that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?

Is that good news just for the time around the funeral?

Doesn't that gospel truth apply across the board and across time?

Doesn't it apply to how we live our lives ... our normal lives?

"Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live ..." Jesus said.

And he meant live differently! Resurrection changes how we look at death

And how we look at life ... including what we understand as 'normal.'

Martha and Mary and a resurrected Lazarus went back

to their normal lives. Actually, they went forward with a new normal

Resurrection surely changed them. I bet they saw every day after that as a gift.

They had to have been so grateful, so hopeful. The whole world would look different to them now. They would still see the bad in the world

but now they could see through it. That is what resurrection does!

The good news of resurrection in and through Jesus certainly helped me

and my brothers as we grieved first my dad, then my mom 3 years later.

We knew death was not the last word. Life was and is.

That knowledge, that faith, extends beyond those times of grief

Doesn't it also apply to the grief of our everyday, normal lives?

This is where, in particular, I keep thinking about our neighbors in Ukraine

What it must look and feel like for them as they go through the valley

of the shadow of death, their normal in their context ... their normal

in the face of death and in Jesus as the resurrection and the life

Talk about a people who, like Martha and Mary, just want to get back to normal.

SUMMARY

The war in Ukraine follows many other wars around the world and in Europe in particular from WWI, the supposed 'war to end all wars' to the war in the Balkans in the 1990's ... the war that tore apart Yugoslavia and laid ruin to the beautiful and vibrant city of Sarajevo

I mention that war today, thirty years later, because I want to share a song with you to end the sermon and serve as our 'hymn of reflection.

We won't sing it. We'll leave the singing to Bono and Luciano Pavarotti.

It is a YouTube clip that shows some scenes of the war torn city

(I think it best to let you know that should it startle or trigger anyone)

I think this song combines those three things running around my head and heart the dangerous and divisive attempts to narrow our definitions of normal, the gospel truth of Jesus as the resurrection and the life as the new normal, and the heartache and hardship of those living through war just trying to live a normal life as best they can

It is a song about something as normal as a beauty pageant

This time a beauty pageant in the middle of a war zone

It is based on the actual pageant in 1993. This is "Miss Sarajevo"

Play YouTube clip

[Passengers - Miss Sarajevo \(Documentary Version\) - YouTube](#)