

“Hallelujah”

In the words of an old and great African American spiritual:

I'm so glad Jesus lifted me.
I'm so glad Jesus lifted me.
I'm so glad Jesus lifted me, singing glory, hallelujah.
Jesus lifted me.

Some of you might know I just broke a liturgical rule. Often in the season of Lent, we refrain from saying, “Hallelujah,” at worship, because of our focus on the suffering and death of Jesus.

We save the “Hallelujahs” and the “Alleluias” for Easter Sunday, the day of Jesus’ resurrection. They help proclaim and celebrate the Lord has overcome the powers of sin, evil and death.

So, it just seemed appropriate today, reading about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, to bring out that word, to sing out loud at public worship – Hallelujah! Thanks to Jesus, Lazarus is risen!

This certainly was no ordinary day in Bethany. Already, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Now, his lifeless body was lying in a tomb, quickly decaying. To be brutally honest, he stunk.

Everyone who loved Lazarus was desperately sad, his sisters, Mary and Martha, his friends and other acquaintances, even Jesus. They were all crying, weeping and distraught with grief.

When Jesus was crying, the people said, “See how he loved him.” And really, this is the key to the whole story. It’s the whole reason Jesus was there. He loved Lazarus and wanted to help him.

And wow, did he help him. Unafraid of the stench, Jesus came to the tomb, and with great love and power said, "Lazarus, come out." Then, Lazarus, no longer dead or decaying, was quite alive.

Doesn't that just make you want to break a liturgical rule and say – Hallelujah! Hallelujah, Jesus' love for his friend Lazarus is stronger than death. Death is no match for the love of Christ.

These are no ordinary days for us either. Our lives have been turned upside down by a microscopic virus. This tiny thing has killed over 31,750 in our world, and over 2,227 in our nation.

To be honest, this really stinks. We are isolated in our homes, scared we might get sick, worried about what's happening to our economy, and sad because people are dying.

Yet, Jesus' love for the world did not end with Lazarus. I believe Jesus has come alongside us in our lives with the same kind of love, because like in our story, he wants to help us too.

My mother-in-law, Alice, is a beautiful person and faithful Christian woman. She is home on hospice and facing death. Even though she has lived 97 amazing years, I feel sad this morning.

The sadness is simply grief. It's what Mary, Martha, their friends and Jesus were feeling when they were weeping over Lazarus' death. To lose Lazarus, to lose Alice, is a personal loss.

But like Lazarus, Alice is a friend of Jesus. She believes Jesus is her Lord and Savior. And so, she is not alone to face dying and death. Jesus is with her. He's there to help her.

And like Jesus came for Lazarus, he will come for Alice too. Jesus will come with a love so strong and powerful, that death is simply no match. Jesus loves Alice and so she will be raised.

My friends in Christ, in the same way, Jesus loves you. He loves you and sees all things that are troubling you, whether that has to do with the coronavirus or something else in your life.

The good news is even if your life does stink right now, and I am sure some of you feel like it does, Jesus is not afraid of the stench. He comes into your life anyway, and he comes to help you.

And he says to you, "I am the resurrection and life." Certainly, this means what Jesus said to Martha, "Those who have faith in me, even when they die, will live again." I mean look at Lazarus!

Still, it means more than that. It means whatever trouble you face today, coronavirus or otherwise, the Lord Jesus, who loves you, comes alongside you to help you, and to give you new life.

Just like Jesus came to raise Lazarus from the dead, just like Jesus will come to raise Alice in due time, Jesus comes to you today, with great love and power, to raise you from your troubles.

Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus, who himself is risen from the dead and has overcome sin, evil and death, he is alongside you at this very moment, ready to raise you up.

Once again, I feel like breaking that liturgical rule and saying, Hallelujah! Hallelujah, Jesus' love for you is stronger than your troubles. Your troubles are no match for the love of Christ.

The only question is – do you believe this? Do you believe Jesus is God's Son, and because he loves you, he is with you, alongside you right now, and able to raise you from your troubles?

I hope this is no ordinary day for you. I hope this is the day you see Jesus for who he really is, your Savior, whose love for you is so strong and powerful, not even death has power over you.

In fact, his love for you is so strong and powerful, nothing has power over you, not the coronavirus, not sin or evil, or any other trouble. From all these things and more, Jesus will raise you up.

Hallelujah! Amen!