

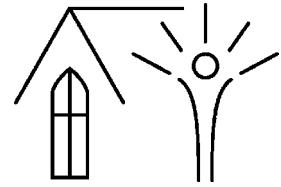


**ROSELLE**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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*Our Mission Statement:*

*"To Know Christ,  
To Grow in Christ,  
To Show Others Christ"*



November 5, 2006

## **Sermon: "Drama In The Desert"**

John 11:32-44

Reverend Thomas Kim

Tuesday, October 17, 2006, the headline news of the *Chicago Tribune* was "Drama in the desert." Its Sport section's title was "CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?" it looked like a Christian newspaper using Christian terminology. The paper was about the previous night's Chicago Bears' football game at Arizona. The grades given by the newspaper were F for the Quarterback, D+ for the Running Backs and the Offense Line, D for the Receivers, and so on and so on. The best grade was a B- for Special Teams. The quarterback of the Bears said, "I never played that bad and won a game." Did you watch the game? I did until "a 290-pound tackle of the Cardinals kept running with an interception until the scoreboard read Arizona 29" with 10:01 left of the fourth quarter. And I went to bed. Lack of confidence! Is there any better story to tell about resurrection than this game in sports?

It was indeed a drama in the desert like the Christian story. Christianity is the religion of resurrection. Today's gospel lesson is a story of resurrection.

Lazarus' story is one of the most well-known Bible stories even though it is only in the Gospel of John. Lazarus was the brother of Martha and Mary. He became very ill and died. When Jesus arrived at their house, Lazarus had been in a tomb for four days. (v.17) Jesus called Lazarus in a loud voice, and Lazarus came out from the tomb. It is the story of the gospel lesson.

I would like to study the Bible verses with care with you this morning, for Jesus shows us how to do our life saving ministry in four steps.

First, "Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled," and wept when he saw Mary and Martha crying.

A girl came to her father and said, "Dad, Jim's dog died today. And he cried all day long." Father said, "It's so sad, what did you do for him?" "Nothing, but I cried with him all the day long, too!"

That's the heart Jesus had for Martha and Mary. He cries with us when we cry. We also are asked that compassionate heart.

Let's go little bit more. When Jesus came to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance. (V.38) Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

The stone was too big to remove for Lazarus by himself who was in the tomb even if he was alive. The structure in our society and systemic sins are sometimes too strong and huge for an individual to

remove or change or break. These stones are sexism, prejudice, classism, racism, and various divisions and evil systems. They are too big and heavy for individuals to remove. It requires us to work together to make our society different.

A rabbi talked to his pupils. “Two chimney sweepers went into a chimney. After their work, one’s face was clean and the other one’s face was dirty. Who went to go clean his face?”

They answered, “The one whose face was dirty.”

“No, the one whose face was clean went to clean his face. Since he saw his partner’s face dirty, he thought he face was dirty too, and went to wash it. But the other one saw his partner’s clean face, and thought his face was clean, too.”

Again, the rabbi asked them the same question, “Two chimney sweepers went into a chimney. After their work, one’s face was clean and the other one’s face was dirty. Who went to go clean his face?”

The students answered in unison, “The one whose face was clean, sir!”

“No, you are wrong. I said, two went into a chimney, and one was clean, and the other one was dirty, but it couldn’t be that way. The question itself was wrong. Both of them were dirty.”

The world is like the chimney. We live in the same world others are living in. Others are hurt today, and we will be hurt sooner or later. That’s systemic sin.

That’s why we, the people of God, have to work together. That’s why we, Methodists, emphasize both personal piety and social holiness. We are the people of God, envisioned by Jesus Christ. We are fighters of God against those sinful powers, and systems. When we take the stone away together; sometimes for others, sometimes for ourselves, we can go forward. This is the second step.

Third, Jesus called, “Lazarus, come out!” with a loud but tender voice. Of course, it was not easy to come out of the tomb because “his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths and with a cloth around his face.”(v.44a) Imagine it!

Now, it was Lazarus' turn to respond, to do something for himself. There are areas you need some help in, and there are areas you have to do something yourself. In the story, Jesus did not come in, nor take him out.

Growing pains are difficult even when there is help; basically you have to encounter them and handle them by yourself. Sometimes we can help a homeless person to find a job, but you can not work for the person. The third stage of our ministry is to encourage people to encounter to handle their issues and problems and come out of the tomb by themselves.

Finally, when Lazarus came out, Jesus said, “Untie him, and let him go.” To whom did Jesus say it? All who are here today. Jesus asks us to untie other’s bondages. The bondages are possibly labels, bias or our own prejudices. That is another step of a faith community.

We live in the broken world, with broken promises, broken families, and broken dreams. People are suffering from various bondages, and we live in the world where they live like Lazarus, who was wrapped in a grave cloth. Still there are areas they need help even after they come out of a cave.

The mission we can think of is to untie people from their bondages, and to remove their pain and sorrow, wipe out tears from their eyes, and to share freedom in Christ, to share love of God, and to share the spirit of forgiveness. That’s the fourth stage of our ministry.

However, the primary thing we have to remember is this: We can follow these four different styles of a ministry, but only Jesus Christ can give the life to us.

I would like to share an example which is a story about Tokichi Ishii who had an almost unparalleled criminal record in Japan.

He had murdered men, women and children in the most brutal ways. Anyone who stood in his way was pitilessly eliminated. Now he was in prison awaiting death. While in prison he was visited by two Canadian women who tried to talk to him through the bars, but he only glowered at them like a caged and savage animal. In the end they abandoned the attempt; but they gave him a Bible, hoping that it might succeed where they had failed. He began to read it, and having started, could not stop. He read on until he came to the story of the Crucifixion. He came to the words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and these words broke him. "I stopped," he said. "I was stabbed to the heart, as if pierced by a five-inch nail. Shall I call it the love of Christ? Shall I call it his compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that I believe, and my hardness of heart was changed." The murderer had been born again; Christ had brought Tokichi Ishii to life. Wasn't it a drama in the desert?

Today is All Saints' Sunday. On this day, we give thanks for all those who have belonged to God, not as plaster saints to the world, but as men and women of flesh and blood, who, by Grace, have come through the muck of being human, have endured the darkness and now shine as stars. Their lives were a witness of the loyalties to which they lived and died for.

The saints of God for us are those persons who inspire us to follow after God. Those who cared us with a compassionate heart, those who took and removed the stone away for us or with us, those who encouraged us to come out of the tomb, and those who untied us to give us freedom. Their devotion to God is like a precious perfume— it leaves a fragrance that calls us to follow after. They remind us that life in Christ can be a possibility for people like us— on earth— now. They are writers of a drama in the desert. And Drama in the desert is still going on here as well.

Praise God. Amen.