Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today’s narrative is significant because it is the last sign or miracle Jesus performed in John in this story of Lazarus being raised from the dead, and is indeed unique to the Gospel of John read for this last Sunday in Lent in the Sunday preceding Palm Sunday, the Sunday of the Passion. All of the Gospels tell of Jesus raising people from the dead but again, only John has the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In the first three synoptic or similar Gospels the cleansing of the temple is the impetus for the religious leaders planning to kill Jesus. In John however, the cleansing of the temple is at the beginning of the Gospel and it is the raising of Jesus’ friend Lazarus to life that is the last straw which incites the religious leaders who when told what Jesus did it Is stated “from that day on they planned to put him to death.”

In the time before this text, Lazarus previously gave a dinner for Jesus which his sister Martha had served and his other sister Mary listened and anointed his feet with costly perfume made of pure nard and wiped them with her hair. When Judas Iscariot questioned the extravagance, Jesus said to leave her alone since she bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial and told how he would not always be with them.

Here we have Martha and Mary send a note to Jesus about their brother Lazarus who is ill with a simple message “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” When Jesus read the note he did not start out to rush to Lazarus’ bedside but instead starts out by stating Lazarus illness does not lead to death but it is for God’s glory so he will be glorified through it. It is an occasion for revelation and bringing the disciples and others to faith. In fact, he stayed for a few days before starting for Judea. It may seem jarring he did not respond to friends in need but this is consistent with Jesus’ hour and his relationship with God, not human timelines and expectations. When they started out for Judea the disciples were clearly scared and they remind Jesus that the religious leaders had just tried to stone him. He responds by telling them when the light of the world walks during the day everything will be oaky. God will protect him, because it is not yet his time. Jesus demonstrates he is not afraid of death - our primal fear. Did they forget John 8:59 that says “So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple” or John 10:39 where ” they took up stones again to stone him but he escaped from their hands” Luke 4:31 tells about how the hometown folk drove him out of town to throw him off a cliff “but he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.” God’s very Spirit was with him and protected him until it was his time to glorify God. But now the attention turns to Lazarus who will glorify God by his being raised from the dead.

Jesus told them their friend Lazarus has fallen asleep and they are going to awaken him. The disciples are concerned for him because they did not realize Jesus was talking about death so he told them plainly Lazarus was dead and that he was glad they were not there so that they would believe.

Upon arriving Jesus discovered Lazarus had been dead 4 days. This is where the usual pattern of Jesus’ signs or miracle change -Jesus interprets the miracle in advance. It is not unusual for other mourners to be present since it is an expected courtesy within Jewish religious practices. Martha both complains and compliments by saying Lazarus would not have died if Jesus was there while at the same time stating that she knows God will give Jesus whatever he wants. Even in her grief she recognizes God will listen to him. Jesus telling her her brother will rise again which could refer to the future resurrection of the dead but Jesus speaks the words at the heart of the story. Jesus tells Martha I AM the resurrection AND THE LIFE. The promise of resurrection is not some distant event but is available now in Jesus, who shares in God’s ability to give life. As the resurrection and the life Jesus defeats death both now and in the future. Martha responds with an act of faith by saying she believes he is the Messiah.

Mary also complains and compliments like her sister Martha. Jesus was great ly disturbed which demonstrates Jesus understands the bitter cost of death in our lives and highlights the ultimate victory over death.

Martha protested when Jesus asked to have the stone rolled away as Jesus confronts the reality of death - there would be a stench (they did not embalm the bodies) and Jesus directed her to the basis of the miracle - if she believed she would see the glory of God. Everything Jesus is able to do comes from God.

When Jesus called out the name of Lazarus he breaks the power of death. Lazarus was wrapped in cloth which was the custom in burials of that time and contrasts with the description of the burial cloths that Jesus left behind at his resurrection. Jesus directed them to unbind Jesu and let him go. Lazarus will have to die another day.

We have a choice. Because of our belief in Christ we are open to God’s unconditional grace and we will be justified at the end. We died with Christ in the baptismal font and are raised with Christ in his glorious resurrection.

The religious leaders felt after this if he continued more people would follow him and the Romans would come and destroy their Temple and nation. They felt it was better to destroy one man than a whole nation.

So, they unwittingly became part of God’s plan to have the Savior die so that others can live to eternity. Once we know what happened we are set free knowing regardless of what happens we will be okay and even the power of death cannot defeat us. We use this freedom to help others just like we do through our mission to feed others through the food pantry as Jesus helps us and tell others about the Good News. On Sundays we come and see and we leave to go and do by loving others as Jesus loves us. Amen.