

## Sometimes Faith Looks Like Waiting

*"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"*

Can you place this quote? If you thought Martin Luther King, Jr., you're right. He spoke these words on April 3, 1968, the day before his death.

We hear in his speech both disappointment and faith--disappointment, because the promised land had not yet come, and faith because he knew it one day would. King's faith overshadowed his disappointment, for he knew that God's time was not his time.

And here we are on the fifth Sunday of Lent. Palm Sunday is next week, which begins Holy Week, and we explore the darkest spaces of human existence before we reach Easter and see God's glory and forgiveness and absolute love. Our days right now may be filled with disappointment--delayed birthday celebrations and weddings, physical separation from loved ones, people we know who are sick or are risking sickness to take care of others, lost jobs and lost purpose and schedule to structure our time--and we see no end in sight. The hope of Easter will look very different this year. Hope seems premature, in fact. For many of us, disappointment overshadows faith right now. We feel a collective grief in the air, a loss of normalcy, economic security, and connection. We already anticipate how our world will be forever changed after the coronavirus. We do not yet know exactly how it will be different, but it will be different.

In today's gospel, we see the seventh and final sign from John. John's Gospel is organized around seven astounding "signs" that reveal Jesus' identity and mission. The turning of water into wine is the first of these signs - and this week's reading, the raising of Lazarus, is the seventh. These signs catch our attention,

drawing us toward God. As Ezekiel tells us, God says, “You shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves” (37:13). Many in Jesus’ day would have known these words and interpreted the raising of Lazarus as an “opening of a grave,” or a sign that God would soon restore Israel and drive out the Roman occupation. Those in power feared that this interpretation would provoke a popular uprising, and so they plotted to get rid of Jesus as soon as possible.

Why did Jesus wait an additional two days before going to Lazarus? By the time Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. In Jesus’ time, many held the belief that the soul lingered around the body for three days after death; by the fourth day, the soul had left the corpse for good. Jesus postpones his arrival until just this point. Jesus truly, fully restores life to Lazarus when there was no possible life left in him. Jesus’ time was not Mary and Martha’s time. Of course, Lazarus’ resurrection is a preview of what is to come: Jesus’ resurrection.

The story of Lazarus--and indeed, the story that is at the center of our faith, which is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus--does not promise that God removes all pain, all disappointment, all grief, or all death. Instead, God promises to be present through it all: the good, the bad, and the ugly. God promised then, and promises now, and promises forever that we humans do not have the final say; God has something better in store, even if all seems lost and we do not yet understand. We have confidence that our current circumstance is temporary; it will one day be over. We today stand with Mary and Martha and Martin Luther King, Jr. and the long line of Jesus followers throughout history as we say: “I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope” (Psalm 130:4). We wait with faith. We hope.

- [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#)
- [Romans 8:6-11](#)
- [John 11:1-45](#)
- [Psalm 130](#)