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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent/Year A  
April 2, 2017  
Text: John 11:1-45

It's funny how song lyrics can stick in our minds. Since Wednesday Evening's Prayer Service, Janet Jackson's song "Control" has played over and over in my head. She sings in part:

*When I was 17 I did what people told me  
Did what my father said,  
and let my mother mold me  
But that was a long ago,*

*I'm in Control - Never gonna stop  
Control - To get what I want  
Control - I like to have a lot  
Control - Now I'm all grown up*

If I could I would ask her, 'What planet do you live on, Ms. Jackson?'

Many people live under the illusion that they have unlimited power and control. We've got 'control-to get what we want and when we want it; control-we like to have a lot'. Give us an inch and we will go for that extra mile and then some no matter who we are. But live long enough and you will find that there are some things one can't control. One of those things being death.

Death is the ultimate thing that is beyond our control. We don't like to talk about it much less plan for it. There is no getting around death no matter what we do though modern science has developed in so many ways that some individuals can cheat death for days, weeks, months, and sometimes even years. But no matter how much we look for immortality through medical science or our never ending gym memberships, death will eventually find us.

As Christians we know this. We have distinctive scriptures and prayers that remind us that one day we will all go to the grave. We began the season of Lent signed with an ashen cross and heard the words, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." And yesterday as we celebrated the life of our sister, Terry, we heard the beautiful words of the opening anthem

*“I know that my Redeemer liveth,  
and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth;  
and though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God’  
whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold,  
and not as a stranger.”*

Still, even the most faithful, quiver in fear of this one thing that cannot be controlled.

Today’s gospel is one that most of us know all too well. How even as Jesus heard that his good friend, Lazarus, lie gravely ill, he waited to see him. And by the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, death had taken control. His friend was stone cold dead. As one theologian put it-Lazarus was ‘graveyard dead.’

In the midst of their sorrow and grieving, Martha and Mary, had hoped their friend, Jesus, would have come to them days ago to heal their brother so that he would not know the sting and stink of death, at least not yet. Each of them told Jesus as much. *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* Even some of the crowd who had heard or seen Jesus’ works wondered, *“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

At this point, John tells us that even Jesus grieved, but Jesus also knew that death would not be the end. So he told those around him to roll away the stone and Jesus called Lazarus back from the dead, giving glory to God and proving who he was and is: the God of life. And we are told that the dead man walked out of his tomb in his grave clothes and Jesus commanded: “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The sign that Jesus performs in the gospel isn’t just the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The most remarkable thing that Jesus does was to proclaim what is possible: that though there is death, there is LIFE and LIFE THAT IS EVERLASTING!

By Jesus coming into the world as God Incarnate, he showed us how to mirror and live fully into the image and likeness of God. And that means that we are given the gift of grace to face our challenges. We have been given the gift of strength to face those things which we cannot control. Jesus calls us to believe in the love of God that is so strong that nothing, nothing, nothing (say: nothing)-not even death can separate us from that love. Jesus calls us to trust even in the midst of our tears that God will see us through our daily dying and risings. And one day Lazarus will be you and me.

And so we hold fast with faith and trust to Jesus' words spoken in today's gospel:

*"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."*

Next Sunday we will enter into Holy Week and remember that Jesus loved all humankind so much that he offered himself upon the hardwood of the cross and died. We can rejoice knowing the rest of the story because on the third day Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again. Jesus became the firstborn of the dead. He took control of death and the chains of death were broken forever. He has indeed shown us that he is "the resurrection and the life." And those who believe in him, even though they die (and we all will), will live-never to die again.

We rejoice because the One who has gone before us will open our graves and our dry bones will live again. He will call us as he called Lazarus, and he will meet us on the other side. And we will live-unbound and free!

Amen!