

## **ALL SAINTS DAY**

**November 4, 2018 (Saint Peter)**

**Pastor David P. Nelson**

**“Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.”**

**Grace and peace be unto you from God our creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

**We are a people of the fourth day. That image of the fourth day is never clearer to me than on All Saints day with these candles burning with the memories of those we so love and miss and the Lazarus story filling the room. We are a people of the fourth day. It is perhaps more palatable for me to tell you a Hallmark tale of how basically good we are and how just and smooth is life. It will taste better and go down easier but it is not true. We are a people of the fourth day.**

**Many things are clear on the biblical fourth day. Jesus arrives in Bethany on the fourth day. Arrives late if you ask Mary and Martha and the family. “Lord if you had been here sooner Lazarus would not have died. There’s disappointment in Bethany. Bethany.....house of affliction in Hebrew. Lazarus.....God helps in Hebrew. On the fourth day we live in the house of affliction.....the house of loss and grief. On the fourth day, God helps. The**

**fourth day is full of tears. Tears everywhere. Mary cries, Martha cries, the family cries, for God's sake Jesus cries. It is all so sad. It is all so damnably sad and all so over. The fourth day stinks. It says it right there. Jesus goes to the tomb of Lazarus and tells them to roll away the stone. And the ever practical Martha says, Geez no Jesus. Lord, this is the fourth day and he will stink of death. The King James version says it most memorably...He stinketh. The fourth day stinketh. It stinketh that these candles burn for people we so loved and so many gone too soon. And it is so damnably over...four days over and Jesus came too late. It all stinks. The death, the mourning, the sin, the mistakes, the regrets, the things we have done and the things we have left undone. And today we know in our bones and to our core that we are a people of the fourth day. In tears and clear that for all our waiting it is too late. The fourth day. It is the day that hope dies. The day that it is officially too late and it stinketh.**

**And also on the fourth day, Jesus loved Lazarus. Loved him enough to weep with sorrow. Loved him enough to come to Bethany--the house of affliction. Loved him enough to roll the stone away from a stinking tomb. Loved him enough to call him out from death to life. Loved him enough to call for him to be unbound and set free. And we are Lazarus. Loved by Jesus. Loved enough by Jesus to make him cry. Loved by Jesus enough for him to come to us.....come to us even when we stinketh. Stinketh in our unfaithfulness, stinketh in our cruelty towards one another, stinketh in our indifference to suffering and injustice, stinketh in our sharp tongues and hard hearts. We are Lazarus. Four days gone and trapped behind a rock. Too late for us.**

**We are Lazarus.**

**Locked away and trapped in death. Wrapped up and bound by so many things.....mostly by the too lateness of life and the hopes that have died. It could be the things we have done that bind us. Could be the things we have let go and failed to do that bind us. Could be the dreams that have come undone, could be the loved ones gone, could be the disappointments of life that have happened to us or the brokenness of life that we have to confess we have had a hand in.... The truth is the 4<sup>th</sup> day captures and gathers up all of the despair and longing of our lives—gathers up all that we have broken and all that has broken us.....all that traps us.....all the hope that has died..... and it stinketh.**

**And the story of Lazarus is a 4<sup>th</sup> day story of what our God can do when it is too late. It is a story that speaks precisely to us when it is too late....precisely when we think it is surely time to give up hope.....precisely when we are most trapped.....Precisely when we got nothing left inside. Bound up in those death wrappings—those grave clothes..... and closed off in that tomb.....all of what binds us and defeats us and restricts us and makes us afraid and broken and hopeless. It's all in there in Lazarus.**

**Take the stone away. But it's too late. I SAID take the stone away says Jesus, with tears still wet in his eyes. I said take away the stone. I said take away the stone. Get it out of the way. Lazarus come out. Substitute your name here.....Bill, come out.....unbind him and let him go. Stephanie, come out..... Unbind her and let her go. Unbind us and let us go. On the 4<sup>th</sup>**

**day....the day that stinketh.....God restores hope...God heals what we thought would always be broken....frees what we thought would always be trapped..... and God raises life up from what we thought was dead. It ain't too late...not with our God. No place God forsaken....no person without hope.....no loved one just gone but gone to God and gone to glory. It's never too late with our God...You cannot bury hope and roll a stone in front of it because Jesus will call it out on the 4<sup>th</sup> day....Jesus will raise it and unbind it and set it free,...Come out people and while you're coming out....shake off what binds you. Come out of your defeat and death and hopelessness. Unbind...throw off what holds you back and holds you down and live. Come out all of you and be free.**

**When it was too late for us.....it was not too late for God. It is not too late for hope....it is not too late for forgiveness.....it is not too late for peace.....it is not too late for healing.....it is not too late for new life. We are Lazarus. Wrapped, bound, and given up for dead. And the God who would raise Jesus on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, goes and gets Lazarus on the 4<sup>th</sup> day.....when it was supposed to be too late. That God comes for us.....comes for us not on our best day but on our 4<sup>th</sup> days.....on the days when we think it is just too late. That comes for us not when we smell good and are walking right but comes to us when we stinketh and wrapped in graveclothes. That God comes for us on the fourth day.....the day of tears and stinkin.....the days of lost and bound. That God comes and raises us from the dead.**

**It ain't never too late or too far gone for our God. Come out people. Come out. Live. Unbind one another and be free.**