

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

4/10/2011

Lazarus, Come Out John 11: 38-44

Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha. He becomes ill and dies. His two sisters are grief stricken. Moved by their grief and love for their brother, Jesus visits the tomb where Lazarus is buried and calls out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" At that, Lazarus appears, his hands and feet and face bound with strips of cloth.

What do you think of this episode? Creepy? Incredulous? Well, believe it or not, there is profound symbolism in it, and it is essential for us to understand it.

In Jesus' days, the tomb stood for spiritual darkness we humans harbor in our inner beings: animosity, self-centeredness, anger and estrangement in general. In other words, the tomb represented human sinfulness.

When we understand this, we begin to comprehend the true intention that this seemingly creepy and incredible episode is trying to convey. It makes four things clear.

One, we are living in darkness. We are self-centered. The scope of our love is narrow; its focus is almost exclusively on our own selves. We love neither God nor our fellow human beings like we should. We are self-preoccupied, prideful, worry-filled, miserable, and insensitive. We are sinners. We are in the tomb. We are all Lazarus.

Two, Jesus liberates us from life in the tomb to life under the brilliant sun. Jesus transforms us from a life of self-centeredness to a life of compassion and love. Jesus is the Transformer. He is the Liberator. He is the Savior.

Then, three, you and I are at a crossroads. Will we heed Jesus' call, "Lazarus, come out"? Or will we turn deaf ears to his call?

It is well for us to be reminded that in order to hear Jesus' call clearly, we need to have a sensitive heart; otherwise we will miss it. Jesus' call takes various forms. This is the fourth point of the story.

Let me share an episode sent to us through e-mail by our friend in Japan last week.

In Sendai, Japan, a grammar school is used to shelter victims of the recent earthquake and tsunami. Volunteers distribute food for them three times a day. Several days ago, among the people lined up for food was a 9 year-old boy wearing only a T-shirt and a pair of shorts.

It turned out that his mother and little sister were missing. His father had been swept away right before his eyes. The boy turned his head and wiped his tears.

A charity worker gave him an extra bag of food. The boy took the food and bowed. He then walked up to the front of the line and put it where the food was waiting to be distributed. Asked if he was not hungry, he replied, "I see a lot more people hungrier than I am."

Don't you hear Jesus' call here? Don't you hear him saying to us, "Come out of the darkness of self-concern. You can live lovingly and compassionately no matter what your situation".

Indeed, nothing, even unprecedented earthquakes and tsunami and even death itself can prevent us from making our human life truly human. Jesus is with us.

Jesus is the way, the life, and the truth. This affirmation is what braces us for the living of these days.

Thank You to God