

In Greek mythology there was a god named Narcissus who walked by a pool of water and decided to drink some. He saw his reflection, became entranced by it, and ended up dying because he could not leave his reflection.¹ The story of this Greek God is a cautionary tale to us that we too will die if we get caught up in ourselves and are unable to see the life of hope that is available to us.

So it is with our spiritual lives. In the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul wrote: “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.”²

In our humanity, it is easy for us to get wrapped up in our own lives and our own little bubbles. Especially during this season of quarantine, we may feel even more removed from the world and our neighbors. In situations of great crisis, we do find that we turn inward and not above. We begin to think that it is up to us to fix everything and then we may feel defeated when we realize that is impossible.

The Apostle Paul reminds us to turn our minds to heaven and not this earth. Yet in our day to day lives we find that can be very difficult. But if we follow Paul’s advice than we, too, can find a deep peace that the world cannot provide. If we set our minds to heaven, then we can get a glimpse of our promised future.

These past six months it has been hard for us to look ahead. Maybe for the first time in all our lives we have become stuck in the present. Yet our faith calls us to continue to look to the future with hope. This same principle holds true as we wait for healing.

As we begin the last week in our “Healing Stories of Jesus” sermon series, Louis Grams remind us that “Healing is not an end to itself. It is a gift that God gives us to encourage us on the road that we are following.”³

In this life we may not experience the ultimate healing we are longing for, but we will experience it in our resurrection lives. This is why we must always look forward in our faith and our journey of healing.

So often we find it is so much easier to look back than to look forward. I don’t know about you, but I look in my rearview mirror a lot. Especially living in the country, I want to make sure that the person behind me knows I am about to slow down to make a turn. I don’t want to be hit by the person behind me.

There are a lot of reasons that we look back instead of forward. Sometimes it is because we have lessons to learn from the past. Sometimes we get stuck in nostalgia thinking about “the good old days.” Other times we look back because we are afraid to move forward into an uncertain reality.

Like Lot’s wife, we too get stuck looking at what is behind us. Lot is an interesting character in the Bible. He is the son of Abraham’s brother, Haran. After the death of his brother, Abraham cares for Lot. It was Abraham that allowed Lot to choose where he and his family would settle. And Lot chose Sodom because it was “the best irrigated land” in the Jordan Valley, but there is one catch...the people who lived there were wicked in the eyes of God.⁴ After Lot and his family live there for twenty years God has had enough and decides to destroy this sinful place.

Commentary tells us that “The angels bring Lot, his wife, and their daughters out of the city before it is destroyed. As they travel Lot’s wife famously looks back at her home, against angelic order, and is turned into a pillar of salt.”⁵ Commentary tells us that “Lot’s wife mirrors his irresoluteness, only she lingers to the point of death.”⁶

Just like the Greek god Narcissus, Lot’s wife is unable to pull herself away from the reflection of her old life. We too find ourselves looking back when we want to hold onto the past and we are not yet ready to go forward into the unknown future.

You know, I probably would have looked back too. We all want a final glimpse of our home before it is gone. We all want to remember every detail of all the things and people that we care about. And yet, the faith that we profess in Jesus Christ continues to call us to look forward.

In Jeremiah 29:11 the prophet says: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” This prophecy still holds true for us today as we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we turn to the Gospel of John, we see that Mary and her sister Martha were in a season of grief and looking back. When Jesus arrived, they told him all the things he should have done to prevent their brother’s death. They had sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was very sick, but in their eyes, Jesus did not come in time and all hope seemed to be lost. Now Lazarus had no future and because he was dead their future would be different as well.

But Jesus knew something they did not know. Jesus knew that Lazarus would experience resurrection. Just as Lazarus was bound after his death, we too find ourselves bound with worry, anxiety, and regret over the past and the present. I wonder what is binding you today. Are you in need of healing? Are you bound with worry or regret? Are you stuck and unable to move forward?

We like many people in the Bible, are unable to see this future which God has created for us.

Jesus showed all who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus that day that they too would get to experience this type of resurrection. Jesus explained who he was to Martha before Lazarus' resurrection took place. He told her: "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" (John 11:25-26).

Although Martha cannot fathom the ramifications of Jesus' statement, she professes her faith in him anyway. We also cannot fully understand the promise of the resurrection, but through our faith in Jesus Christ, we also get to experience it.

Our resurrection lives can begin today. We don't have to wait until our physical bodies die. Our resurrection life begins when we know that death does not have the final word. When we know that bitter political feuds do not have the final word. When we know that pandemics do not have the final word, but that God defeats death and claims victory over everything.

Through our faith in Jesus Christ we are promised that we experience healing and get to spend every moment of our spiritual lives in the presence of God. We can start participating in this healing ministry through embodying our role as the body of Christ.

What is beautiful about the story of Lazarus is that it is the community who unbinds him from his wrappings of death. There he is after his resurrection, alive, but trapped in the clothes he was buried in. Mummified he walks out, but he cannot be free without the help of the body of Christ.

The gift of the church is a gift of grace from God. It is the body of Christ who can also help us to be unbound from our sin, our worry, our past, and our present. It is the body of Christ who can help us look forward to the future with hope. And it is the body of Christ who sits at the eternal communion table.

As we participate in the sacrament of communion today (whether in person or virtually) we remember that communally we experience healing through this means of grace.

At the communion table we are forgiven, reconciled, reminded what Christ did for us and what is to come: that “Christ will come in final victory.” At the communion table we are sent out into the world to care for one another and share the good news of Christ with others.

At the communion table we commune with the saints and are cheered on as we continue in our journey of discipleship. At the communion table we are healed as Christ gives us spiritual nourishment for the journey ahead.

So dear church, do not lose heart, the promise of the resurrection is still available to us today.

The good news for our lives is that there is a lot to look forward to, if only we would cling to our hope in Jesus Christ.

Instead of dwelling on the present or the past it is time for us to look forward to the future. As we continue to partner with Jesus Christ in healing may we continue to be aware of those desperately in need of hope and healing.

If you have the name of someone to lift in healing today, please reach out to them this week and let them know that we are praying for them. Prayer continues to be a powerful part of faith and God’s healing ministry in the world.

As we look towards our sermon series next week, which is about being grateful, I want you to think about one thing that you are looking forward to and that you are grateful for. We will share these things during our prayer time next week.

May God continue to help us to look to the future with hope. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

¹[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_\(mythology\)#:~:text=Narcissus%20walked%20by%20a%20pool,have%20his%20object%20of%20desire.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_(mythology)#:~:text=Narcissus%20walked%20by%20a%20pool,have%20his%20object%20of%20desire.)

² Colossians 3:1-4.

³ Louis Grams. “The Healing Stories of Jesus: Signs of the New Creation.” The Word Among Us Press: Frederick, Maryland, 2020. P. 90.

⁴ Katherine Sakenfield et al. The New Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary. Vol. III. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2008. P. 701.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Leander Keck et al. New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. Vol. I. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 140.