

Rev. Janet R. Doyle

Elmer Presbyterian Church

5th Sunday of Lent

Sunday, April 6, 2025

Scripture: John 11: 1-44

Sermon: For God's Glory: The Encourager

People need encouragement in these times. There is so much doubt, so much fear, so much anxiety, so much pain and brokenness. People often say, "I don't know about this world ... it doesn't seem like a world I want to live in; and I can't imagine what it will look like in the future for my children."

No doubt it is easy to be discouraged about the state of the world. There are billions of dollars of media constantly telling you how bad things are. And maybe there will be aspects of the future world that are worse. But you know what? This is God's world. Therefore, you can live in it. Your children can live in it too.

The phrase "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" from 1 John 4:4 means that the power of God, residing within believers, is stronger than any evil force in the world.

How can we be encouraged during these days? "To encourage" means to provide support, confidence, or hope. The Biblical New Testament Greek term translated as "encourage" is "parakaleo." It has a variety of meanings. Beseech, comfort, exhort, desire, pray. What is notable is that all of these meanings of the Biblical term relate to a spoken encouragement. It is possible to be encouraged in ways other than speaking. Encouragement can be through an action for example. As they say, actions speak louder than words. But essentially encouragement in the scriptures is a spoken encouragement.

To be an encourager then, we need to "build up" not tear down. Look around you. Who need's encouragement? Who first comes to your mind? Identify them. If you're going to be an encourager, you need someone to encourage. So that is step one in going forward. Look for those in need of encouragement.

Do you know who needs encouragement? Everyone. Everyone needs encouragement. One way to encourage another is through prayer. Pray that the Lord would work on the heart of the person or persons that you've thought

of needing encouragement. Pray for them. And then tell them: “I was praying for you.” That is encouragement. Perhaps they might think “Wow, someone cares enough about me to pray for me?”

Then, there is encouragement by the Word through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter or Encourager. Jesus says he will send another, a comforter who encourages. The Holy Spirit works to encourage you. He encourages your heart, giving you faith. It is the Word of God that is encouraging.

Romans 15:4 says, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” So we are to encourage others with Biblical truths, and it will also encourage us!

You can see how different Christian encouragement is compared to the world’s encouragement. The world’s encouragement is more flattery and Christian encouragement is real hope in our Savior Jesus Christ.

The world’s encouragement is about you. The Bible’s encouragement is about God, FOR you and the Holy Spirit working in you. That’s where our comfort is, where our hope is, where our support is. It is with God, and God alone.

His Gospel encourages us to hold fast. His Gospel strengthens our hope in the resurrection. The Word of God ENCOURAGES. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” I think we can do great things through encouragement because Jesus was a great encourager himself.

Our scripture lesson this morning is a wonderful passage that should encourage our life and faith. Bringing Lazarus back to life, a story found only in John, is the seventh and last major sign in John’s gospel. It is the culmination, the dramatic climax, of Jesus’ miracles. What could possibly encourage Mary and Martha than bringing their brother Lazarus back from being dead for four days?

Lazarus never asked to be raised from the dead, nor did Mary, Martha, or anyone else ask Jesus to resurrect him. They wanted Jesus there earlier when he was sick to heal him. How could they have imagined that bringing Lazarus out of the tomb was even possible?

“Lazarus, come out!” were encouraging words to Martha, Mary, Lazarus and all who witnessed this miracle of death becoming life. Lazarus heard the Good Shepherd’s voice call to him, and Lazarus obeyed.

The raising of Lazarus was a sign of Christ's power over death. He is “the life” who pulls down that wall that can seem so impenetrable to us, the wall of death. It shows us Christ's lordship over death. Christ gives us a trustworthy hope of life beyond death, and this is the ultimate encouragement to a lost and broken world.

Like the other signs, Jesus performed this miracle, not for His own gain, but so that people would recognize God in their midst and glorify God. Unlike other miraculous signs, this one required the involvement of the immediate faith community. Despite hearing their complaint “Lord, he’s going to smell!” Jesus called the local faithful to play a key role in completing the miracle.

“Unwrap him and let him go!” If God could bring Lazarus back from the dead, couldn’t God restore Lazarus to 100% health and happiness? Why would God hold back? God desires to be in an encouraging relationship with all of us which means including us as key participants in God’s healing, restorative, transformational and encouraging work for those around us.

“Unwrap him and let him go!” Try to imagine what Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is asking his followers, then and now, to do. Get involved in ministry. Encourage and help others step out into a new, resurrected life knowing Jesus Christ as their Good Shepherd and as their Risen Savior.

To both of these commands, **“Lazarus, come out!”** and **“Unwrap him and let him go!”** we are compelled to ask ourselves how they apply to us. God is asking us, challenging us to believe in Jesus and his Resurrection power. We are to be encouraged this Lenten Season knowing we are Children of the King and encouraged knowing that our Savior Jesus is Alive. Jesus said to Martha that day at Lazarus’ tomb, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” Jesus was encouraging Martha that this was not the end but the beginning of new life in him.

Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” Jesus was an awesome encourager, and when you think about how He encouraged, He encouraged in His teachings, but also, He was an encourager in His encounter with other people.

We can also encourage people we meet by our words and our actions.

Right now we can say to the Lord Jesus, "I need Your encouragement. I need to ask You to forgive me of my sins. I do believe that Jesus went to the

cross and died for my sins. And I'm asking You, Lord, to forgive me. I'm surrendering my life to You. And Lord, I do pray that You will help me to be an encourager to someone else, as others have tried to be to me".

Your life can be changed right where you are, right at this moment simply by asking for the forgiveness of your sins, placing your trust in Jesus as your personal Savior and asking him to encourage you in your walk and discipleship.

Many people have been inspired to succeed in life by somebody's encouragement. I think most people who've succeeded in life or overcome difficulties in their life, they'll tell you that someone encouraged them at a particular time, and they never forgot it. You see, it doesn't take a lot to be an encourager. So, all of us should be, because Jesus was and taught it and all of us need to be encouragers because we live in a world full of people who are discouraged.

Who encourages you in your life? Everybody needs an encourager. The truth is all of us need to be encouragers. There are people you and I need to encourage and pray for the Holy Spirit to encourage them in their journey. All of us need to be encouraged because all of us go through difficult times in our life.

So, whatever it might be, everybody needs encouragement.

Our Savior is ready to encourage us in our journey and to fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we never feel alone.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning be encouraged, knowing that Jesus invites you. Come to the table knowing that sitting with your Savior Jesus Christ he will fill you with his Spirit.

Come to the table knowing that Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life so that you can encourage others along their journey that Jesus loves them, forgives them, and died for them so they might have life. Jesus did it all for God's Glory and our salvation.