

Lent Va: 4/2/17
The Rev. Dee Anne Dodd
St. Paul's Wallingford CT

Pardon my Swedish,
but are you familiar with *uppgivenhetssyndrom*?
Literally, "giving up on life syndrome".

It's an actual condition
documented in the journal, Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience,
suffered by hundreds of refugee children and youth
mostly in Sweden.
It involves otherwise healthy children
who become immobilized into a coma-like state
for months or even years at a time.
The trigger is the uncertainty of whether or not their families will be deported.
So, doctors say, these young people "give up on life"
in a sort of heart-breaking human hibernation.

I'm not suggesting that Lazarus,
raised to new life by Jesus in today's gospel,
suffered from *uppgivenhetssyndrom*.
He was dead. *Really* dead.
Lazarus had been dead for four days by the time Jesus got there.
Long enough to prove that it wasn't just a deep sleep,
long enough for his body to stink,
longer than Jesus would lay in the tomb.

But Lazarus is not the only one
given a new lease on life in today's gospel.
It is to Martha, at her lowest point,
that Jesus proclaims himself the "resurrection and the life."
Resurrection in the life to come, absolutely --
but resurrection in *this* life too.
Jesus not only raises Lazarus to new life,
but Martha and Mary and all who mourn.
New and resurrected life in Christ begins now in *this* mortal life.

Even in the awe-inspiring act of raising Lazarus,
Jesus involves folks like us.
You "take away the stone", he tells them.
He prays outloud so everyone can hear what's going on.
And once Lazarus is raised, he tells them to
"Unbind him, and let him go."

Jesus the Christ could easily do any of this himself,
but chose to invite others into a community of love and service.
Jesus chose to welcome their lives into his,
and to put them to work in his name.

The resurrection and the life Jesus offers Martha in her darkest hour
is for us too.

But not for us alone.

It's for us to share

especially with those who need it most,
those who might be tempted to give up on life --
the lonely, the outcast, the addicted,
those who mourn, refugees and immigrants right here.

Giving up on life syndrome as a technical diagnosis,
appears for now, to be confined to that population of
refugee children in Sweden, God bless them.
Medical researchers attest that localized cases of
clinical contagion happen.

So, without minimizing the severity of this ailment,
I suspect that some (many?) of us here know something of
how it feels to give up on life,
whether personally or through someone close to us.

Please know you're not alone.

Remember this story of Martha, Mary and Lazarus reminds us that
God in Christ comes to us wherever and in whatever state we're in,
and that the Easter promise of resurrection
is soon to be fulfilled.

Do not give up on life, my companions in Christ.

Not yours or anyone else's.

Give your life to Jesus.

Then, for Christ's sake, give it away in love and service to others.

#