

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, she of *On Death And Dying* fame, would have been right at home in the eleventh chapter of John. Its dynamics reflect much of what she identifies in the stages/emotions evoked in the face of dying. One tendency in the story of Jesus raising Lazarus is to focus on its revelation of Jesus' divinity. But in equally powerful ways, John reveals the humanity of Jesus (and others) in ways that make the story accessible to our own experiences of grief and hope.

"Lord, he whom you love is ill." One early heresy of the church, Docetism, argued that Jesus only *appeared* to be human. Apparently, they missed this verse. The verb John uses here is *phileo*, the love associated with friendship or kinship. Lazarus was as a brother to Jesus. Jesus' investment in this story goes deeper than providing a case study in theology. He grieves, too.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." These words of Martha, and later Mary, intrigue. On one level, they confess Jesus as a healer. On another level, they hint at Kubler-Ross's stage of anger. "If you had been here" carries a tone of blame. There is a raw honesty in these words of the sisters of Lazarus. Left unsaid, perhaps they would grow inside and gnaw at their spirits. Instead, Martha and then Mary trust Jesus to be big enough to absorb them, a trust required for raising prayers of lament to God. Of being, if you will, honest to God.

"Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb." John used this verb earlier in the reaction of Jesus to the weeping of mourners. But its literal meaning at the tomb, in the face of death, speaks with special power. It derives from "to be moved with anger" and even "to snort with anger." The guttural sense of what John has in mind may be heard in its King James' translation as "groaning." Or better yet, *The Message* rendering as "a deep anger welled up."

Why? In John and the other gospels, in Isaiah and Ezekiel, in Paul's writings and Revelation: Death stands as the final foe. For Death claims the fear that all ends in annihilation. Jesus stands at Lazarus' tomb, sees that power and its effects – and is righteously angered. God has other purposes. *"Lazarus, come out!"* In that summons, does death begin to grieve its own dying?

For Reflection and Action:

What parts of this story do you find most comforting; most disturbing; why?

How have your experiences of grieving shaped your faith?

Where and how might the church be called today to engage in "grief work:"

with individuals; with communities?