

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT March 22 Ezekiel 37:1-14 John 11:1-45

What caught my attention in this Good News story from John 11: 1-45?

Once again, the Gospel Reading from John is lengthy, covering 45 verses.

Out in the countryside along roadways between small villages, Creator Sets Free Jesus continues to Teach, bringing new interpretations to the Hebrew Scriptures and new possibilities for all those who watch him and listen to his words.

Creator Sets Free Jesus receives a messenger sent by his friends Healing Tears Mary and Head Woman Martha. Their brother Creator Helps Him Lazarus is very sick and about to die. These sisters also invite Creator Sets Free Jesus to come to their home in House of Figs Bethany. However, Creator Sets Free Jesus continues to Teach for another two days before gathering up those closest to him and beginning his journey to the home of his friends outside the walls of Jerusalem. On their way, those closest to Creator Sets Free ask him an important question: **“Wisdom keeper! Some who support the religious authorities tried to throw stones at you to kill you! Why do you want to go back there?”** John 11:8.”

Not surprisingly, in a playful way, Creator Sets Free answers them: **“Does not the sun give us a full day of light? The ones who walk in the day never stumble, because they see the light which shines on this world. But the ones who walk at night stumble in the darkness, because there is no light for them to see.”** John 11:9,10. Those who are closest to Creator Sets Free do not understand his answer.

His followers remember what happened when the religious authorities the Pharisees got so angry believing that Creator Sets Free Jesus broke the Law of Moses and healed a man born blind on a Sabbath Day. When the religious authorities also confronted Creator Sets Free Jesus just outside the Temple in Jerusalem, questioning him to identify himself. These religious authorities became enraged and picked up stones to throw them at Creator Sets Free. Somehow Creator Sets Free Jesus walks away from immanent danger and keeps walking until he reaches the waters of the Jordan River.

Creator Sets Free Jesus sees that those closest to him do not understand his answer and ignores their fears about their Wisdomkeeper being put to death.

Again, in a playful way, Creator Sets Free Jesus tells his followers that he needs to visit his friend Creator Helps Him Lazarus who is sleeping. Those who are closest to him say that there is no rush then to get back to that small village just outside of Jerusalem and put his life in danger. To bring light to their confusion, Creator Sets Free Jesus speaks plainly. **“Creator Helps Him Lazarus is dead.”** John 11:14. Creator Sets Free Jesus willingly puts himself in harms way.

Looks Like His Brother Thomas stated that in returning to House of Figs Bethany outside Jerusalem, he was prepared to die too.

As this Good News story unfolds, much happens.

What is God saying to us in this Good News story?

At this point in time and space, Creator/Divine Mystery/Great Spirit reminds us that we live in a universe where and when Creator and Creator Sets Free Jesus together bring new life into being. In the middle of chaos and violence and poverty, reality is radically different for those who walk in a good way, being generous and showing lovingkindness to all too.

During our Lenten Talking Circles, participants have been exploring the book **MEDICINE WHEEL FOR THE PLANET: A JOURNEY OF PERSONAL AND ECOLOGICAL HEALING (Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2024)** by Jennifer Grenz. In the last two segments of this book, the author uses the Indigenous Teachings from the South and the West on her journey. The author moves away from beliefs and practices of Western Scientific Knowledge towards an understanding of Indigenous Knowledge and research methodology. As a field practitioner, Jennifer Grenz journeys from doing the work of ecological restoration to living a way of life healing the planet. This change in language demonstrates a significant shift in thinking and acting in creation. She moves from performing an ecological function in removing invasive species in the forests and waterways of British Columbia. She picks up the challenges of adjusting the ecological balance between a host of communities who she regards as relatives in creation. Jennifer Grenz invites us to enter into relationships with all of the parts of creation who also bear a part of the image of Creator. For Indigenous Peoples, Human Beings are not created to have dominion over other creatures, trees, plants, grasses on the land and in the waters as well as over the materials of the universe. Human Beings are created to live not in the centre of life but around the edges of the circle with each of our kin. Each part of the circle has been given responsibilities by Creator to sustain each other and care for all of our relatives, particularly the most vulnerable. The term in restorative ecology for **ecosystem health** becomes through Indigenous cultural teachings and spiritual practices **the state of ecological balance**. Human Beings have been given

responsibilities by Creator/Divine Mystery/Great Spirit to closely watch all of our kin, to speak with respect, to ask permission to harvest these relatives, and to listen to their stories about their own contributions in the circle of life. The term in ecological restoration for **restoration target** becomes in Indigenous ecology **desired ecological balance**. Towards the beginning her journey of transformation, Jennifer Grenz learns from an Elder that she needs to spend a whole day sitting in the grasses at the archeological site Ye'Yumnuts on the traditional territories of Quamichan (Cowichan Peoples), watching and listening to all of the different forms of life interacting in front of her. In following the Teachings of this Elder, Jennifer Grenz makes changes to the framework she learned from western science and opens herself to new ways of thinking, feeling towards different species surrounding her, and acting towards these all of these parts of creation. She learns how an Indigenous understanding of ecology profoundly changes her relationships with all of her kin. She builds relationships and increases her respect for each of her relatives. Her actions change. Instead of removing invasive species and burning them, she begins to plant them in her own garden. She learns that both herself and her daughter benefit from two of these invasive species when these are used as medicines. Her children enjoy the berries of an invasive bush. The bees thrive among a particular invasive species and pollinate all of the plants in her huge garden. Birds gather and bring music to their lives. After doing some research, she learns that one invasive plant can be purchased from a local nursery and will draw Monarch Butterflies to her small farm. She buys these plants and puts them along the edge of her garden. She stops weeding and sees invasive species move from the surrounding forests and take root among her garden beds, increasing the **diversity of species** on this small piece of land. The term **community dynamics** from the work of ecological restoration becomes in Indigenous ecology **relationships of relations**. Jennifer Grenz abandons hierarchical pyramids with Human Beings establishing positions of dominance and maintaining these positions by exercising this power. It is not surprising that in her transition from doing ecological restoration and fixing a broken world into becoming a healer of the planet as an Indigenous woman, Jennifer Grenz gets treated as many Indigenous people are treated. She is ignored and frequently overridden in planning meetings for giving shape to restoration projects and obtaining funds from government agencies and the public. The term **ecological stability** from the framework of ecological restoration becomes understood in an Indigenous understanding of healing the planet as **a balance in resiliency**. Climate change impacts the land, forests, plants, grasses, and waterways. Soils become warmer. Less water or too much water causes problems. Fewer fish reduces the fertility of soils in forest edges. Particular plants and medicines disappear. Populations of birds and animals decrease or move to places where sources of nourishment are easier to access. Old growth forests are replaced by new ecosystems. Waters heat up. Creatures in these waters alter migration patterns and underwater vegetation changes. Pollutants cause harm on land and in the air as well as in waterways and oceans. Human Beings create harm to this planet and to her inhabitants.

What is God calling us to be and do?

Creator Sets Free Jesus approaches the place where his friend Creator Helps Him Lazarus has been anointed, wrapped in cloths, and laid to rest. Creator Sets Free Jesus commands that the stone sealing the cave be rolled aside. Outside the open tomb, Creator Sets Free Jesus looks upward and talks to the One who sent him to this world and give thanks for this opportunity to demonstrate generosity and compassion for all to see and hear. In a loud voice, Creator Sets Free Jesus commands, **"Creator Helps Him Lazarus, come out of there!"** John 11: 43. When Creator Helps Him Lazarus stumbles out the burial cave, Creator Sets Free Jesus tells his mourning family and friends, **"Take off his wrappings and set him free!"** John 11: 44.

Imagine what this experience was like for Creator Helps Him Lazarus after he has lain in death's embrace for four days. Imagine how his sisters reacted when he emerged from this sacred cave. Imagine what his friends felt.

In drawing her book to a close and to illustrate her own transformation, Jennifer Grenz uses the Teachings of Frogs, much appreciated by Indigenous Peoples along the Pacific Ocean. Like a tadpole swimming in a world of a pond, her body changes and she grows tiny legs. She emerges from the pond. She crawls over the shore. She hops into the edge of the forest. She leaves behind her work in ecological restoration and moves forward into doing Indigenous ecology. Her head meets her heart. Her own healing opens her to a new way of life in the work of healing the planet.

As we move through this season of Lent and prepare ourselves for the remembrance of the death of Creator Sets Free Jesus, let us be open to be transformed in the light Creator Sets Free Jesus gives us. Help us to let go of beliefs and behaviours which cause harm and wreak damage on this planet so loved by Creator/Divine Mystery/Wisdom of the Universe and by Creator Sets Free Jesus. May we step into the responsibilities given to us by Creator to care for all of our relatives both Human and more-than-human Beings, particularly the most vulnerable among us. May we show respect towards all of those communities among whom Creator has placed us in creation. As we benefit from the many ways in which our kin in creation provide for our daily needs, may we reciprocate with gratitude and affection, caring for all of our kin.

Creator Sets Free Jesus freely and willingly put one foot in front of each other to return to the village outside Jerusalem. Give us courage to pick up the work of healing this planet.