

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**

**Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 2, 2017**

**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**John 11:1-45**

**For Reflection**

**"You could make the most beautiful film, and that weekend it's raining too hard on the East Coast, and no one goes out. Artists should have a chance to do it again. That's the challenge: Women artists don't get a second chance. People-of-color artists don't get a second chance. You're put in director's jail, and that's a wrap."**

- Ava DuVernay, American Film Director b.1972

**"Easter is very important to me, it's a second chance."**

- Reba McEntire, American Country Musician b.1955

**Second Chances**

The Last Temptation of Christ – a controversial novel by Nikos Kazantzakis published the year I was born – includes a recounting of the resurrection of Lazarus. But in his passionate tale, the body of Lazarus never really revives – he spends his day in a rocking chair, partially decayed and smelling to high heaven, until his next demise. And as much as I revere Kazantzakis, this is not how I imagine this story as intended. I have to imagine that, perhaps over a few days, Lazarus regains his health and bodily integrity – so that he can really take advantage of his second chance at life. Zombiehood doesn't really do it for me.

The story in our text tries to make sense of Jesus deliberately "allowing" Lazarus to die – staying away until it was too late to heal him of his terminal disease – creating an unnecessary resurrection moment so that onlookers will believe he is G-d. Being the contrary reader I tend to be, I think it's a cover up for the fact that Jesus made a mistake. The trip to Bethany was a dangerous one, he was in the middle of something he wanted to finish when word came, and he intentionally delayed in responding. Once he got to Bethany he realized his mistake. The grief of his favorite sisters, the loss of his friend Lazarus, brought him to tears. He needed a second chance as much as Lazarus did. And G-d allowed it – even encouraged it.

Our book is full of stories about second chances. Heck, all of humankind got a second chance in the Noah and Flood story. The Hebrew people got a bunch of chances to do better and rebuild their nation. So, this story could be interpreted in such a way with complete integrity. I think. I hope.

As I was blathering on about this to John in the car on the way to see “Star Wars: Rogue One” (speaking of stories of second chances) – he said, “You know community colleges are all about second chances.” He’s the Supervisor of Learning Services at Moorpark College and serves an older population than you would find at private colleges. I was thinking of veterans coming back to retool – but John pointed out that some people just aren’t ready to focus on their studies until some years into adulthood. They come back when they realize the importance of the degree – or when the kids are finally in school – or when they want to improve their job situation. Public education is a chance and a second chance and third and fourth chance to live life fully. [Somebody ought to tell Betsy DeVos that...]

And if there is a group of people who should know about second chances, it would be Mt. Hollywood CC-UCC. When this church was searching for a minister, the Church Profile stated that – freed from land ownership and building maintenance responsibilities – Mt. Hollywood wanted to become something different and new. This motley bunch was anticipating a second chance at being relevant, cutting edge, meaningful. And coming directly from the deathbed of my previous call – laying to rest a beautiful 100-year-old church by the sea – I wanted to be part of a resurrection. So here we are... Struggling a little bit over whether we are a zombie or a fully alive organism evolving into a new creature... Taking this second or third or fiftieth chance to make a difference... To give this world, this planet a chance to live again.

We have the opportunity, in a very real way, to be part of the Emerging Church Movement – which may even be called something else by now – as that term came into being back in 1970.

See if you can identify us in this description distilled for us by the wondrous, ever-present ever-evolving Wikipedia:

The emerging church is a Christian movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries that crosses a number of theological boundaries: participants are described as Protestant, post-Protestant, evangelical, post-evangelical, liberal, post-liberal, conservative, post-conservative, anabaptist, reformed, charismatic, neocharismatic, and post-charismatic. Emerging churches can be found throughout the globe, predominantly in North America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa. Some attend local independent churches or house churches while others worship in traditional Christian denominations.

Proponents believe the movement transcends such "modernist" labels of "conservative" and "liberal," calling the movement a "conversation" to emphasize its developing and decentralized nature, its vast range of standpoints, and its commitment to dialogue. Participants seek to live their faith in what they believe to be a "postmodern" society. What those involved in the conversation mostly agree on is their disillusionment with the organized and institutional church and

their support for the deconstruction of modern Christian worship, modern evangelism, and the nature of modern Christian community...

Members of the movement often place a high value on good works or social activism, including missional living...

Communitarian or egalitarian ecclesiology: Proponents of the movement communicate and interact through fluid and open networks because the movement is decentralized with little institutional coordination. Because of the participation values named earlier, being community through participation affects the governance of most Emerging Churches...

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging\\_church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church)

In addition, there are secular versions of what we are doing here. Jim Burklo was sharing with me the other day his awareness of a phenomenon called “Sunday Assemblies.”

Sunday Assembly is a non-religious gathering co-founded by Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans in January 2013 in London, England. The gathering is mostly for non-religious people who want a similar communal experience to a religious church, though religious people are also welcome.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday\\_Assembly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday_Assembly)  
<http://www.sundayassemblyla.org/>

There are Sunday Assemblies in LA at this point – communities or base-camps for people searching for meaning without needing to involve G-d or Divinity in the equation.

Jim is also acquainted with Larry Harvey, co-founder of Burning Man, and a man well-aware that this secularly created experience has a deep spiritual power – with or without a belief in The Divine. In his article (which I urge you to read – link below) he describes the burning of the Temple – the most powerful moment for me of that experience you supported two years ago. He describes it as “Radical Ritual” and suggests the following:

There are two basic views of divinity. The first sees the divine as transcendent; the other views the divine as immanent. **Transcendence** is from the Latin word *transcendentem*: it means surmounting, rising above, as if to step up on a ladder. **Immanence** derives from the Latin *immanere* and evokes the feeling of an indwelling presence. It refers to all that is inherent in our being. For all practical purposes, the rituals I have described support these feelings and perceptions — they are very nearly textbook examples of religious experience.

The only thing that this leaves out is supernatural agency, an external power that is said to hover over us and inform our deepest feeling of reality. William James has said that, “All the facts require is that this power be both other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do”, he adds, “if only it be large enough to trust for the next step.” The Man we’ve made, of course, is not a god, nor is the burning of the Temple evidence of supernaturalism. Energy

did not flow from the Man into a group of followers. Rather it was their energy, their full-hearted participation that created the Man. When people joined in chorus round the Temple, it was their voiced spirit, and not divine afflatus, that united them.

<http://journal.burningman.org/2017/01/philosophical-center/spirituality/radical-ritual-spirit-and-soul/>

We are arranging for Larry Harvey to speak here and help us along in our journey to understand and evolve toward a meaningful presence in our current world context.

Some of this may sound familiar as Hilary recently invited us to participate in “Open Circle” – a regular gathering of artists, art lovers, and open-hearted citizens in need of support and inspiration – created by her theatre company, Chalk Rep. Today’s Open Circle is on the theme “Migration” – and six of us plan to join the conversation at 6:30 this evening. (See Mt. Hollywood enews and a forwarded email from Hilary for more information).

All of this is about second chances – ways in which humans are participating in resurrection – new life – meaningful life in these post-modern years when even the planet’s survival is in question. Pastor Joseph Castañeda-Carrera, the new minister of Hollywood Lutheran, is half-time at HollyLuth. His other half-time is pastoring a gathering of LGBTQ+ folks – mostly people of color – who meet for dinner twice a month and have “Hike Church” a few times a month. They would not set foot in a church building, but find G-d in nature and in meals together. We’ve talked about the garden here as a place we might find ways for our communities to gather – learn from each other – find meaning in the interaction.

Second Chances often involve letting go of SOME beloved ideas and traditions – and ALWAYS involve thinking outside the box, trying new things, being open to learning from others.

Lent and Easter are traditionally our seasons of preparations for change and then the BECOMING of a NEW BEING.

This is our season of second chances.

We can be zombies – allowing smelly death to cling to us to the end...

Or we can hike somewhere, burn something, talk with people very different from ourselves – and regenerate our body for life in this new time.

Let’s choose Life.

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Children’s Time

Butterflies Under Our Hats

by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

**John 11:1-45**

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' 8 The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' 9 Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' 11 After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' 12 The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' 23 Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' 24 Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' 25 Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 27 She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' 37 But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' 40 Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.