

**Title:** The Invisible wellspring of Hope

**Text:** John 11: 1-42

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Recently I learned that at a medical centre in the Midwest USA – a massive steel and glass institution – Brahms’s “Lullaby” is played through the hospital’s PA system whenever a baby is born. The music is pumped into every room – of all the departments – orthopedics, cardiac intensive care, the ER, the operating rooms, the administrative offices, even the security command centre.

As people are rushing to their next meetings with tension and stress, in the midst of the weighty suffering – there is a pause, a breath, a delight, an ease.

It seems that Brahms’s “Lullaby” and with it the reminder of new life, for a short while, filled the air with hope.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu said: Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness. Vaclav Havel, Czech philosopher, suggests that hope is an orientation of spirit.

It doesn’t arrive from the outside, rather it is an abiding state of wellbeing, a hidden wellspring within us.

Frank Ostaseski, *The Five Invitations*  
Discovering what Death can teach us about living Fully.

**The Miracle stories in Johns’ gospel are dramatized theology.**

Each of the miracles of Jesus are signs.

And just as smoke is a sign of fire and clouds a sign of rain (and a fever and dry cough the signs of COVID 19), the miracles of Jesus, in John’s writings, are a sign of glory.

**They are observable phenomena which reveal a greater reality.**

**The seen revealing the unseen.**

This is the last and greatest miracle-sign story in John’s gospel. The first was at a wedding, the last at a funeral. The penultimate, a healing of a blindman. This final one, a raising from death, a resuscitation.

And the whole story pivots on the central words Jesus speaks:

**I am resurrection, I am life. Evoking the very name God gave to Moses. I am.**

In Hebrew: *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*, and literally it means, I will be who I will be.

In the Book of Exodus – When Moses asked God for God’s name. Its as if God said: ‘I’m not giving you a handle’ Simply know me as this: “I am the very principle of becoming, of allowing the possible to happen.” (Torah scholar, Aviva Zornberg)

**Jesus as Christ embodies the possibility of resurrection, and of new life.**

As the story goes, Jesus is summoned to perform a healing of a man he deeply loved. And when he arrives, that man, his beloved friend, has already passed through death.

In the first century Jewish funerals occurred as close to the day of death of possible. The body would lie in a stone tomb for a year. And then the remains would be placed in an ossuary.

**As theology dramatized:**

Jesus' presence amidst this families suffering is God's presence with us.

Jesus' deep and troubled emotion; Jesus' tears is God's sorrow for us.

Lazarus' rising from death to life is God's gift of the wellspring of hope that rises within us.

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And this also a very human story.

It resonates with our own experience.

- The death of a loved one
- The emotion of grief
- The mourning of friends
- The hope of resurrection

Many of us are holding grief. We have lost people we deeply loved. For some of us this grief is very present and all encompassing. Like the tides of the ocean. Grief rises and falls. A constant rhythm of remembering, feeling pain, expressing sadness and letting go. Again and again, it can be relentless.

Mary and Martha image for us different responses to loss – some of us slow down and need to sit and be, others of us need to be active and do.

The St Catherine's community has postponed two memorials due to the Global Pandemic.

This community is holding deep grief.

Jesus tears are such gifts to us. Not only do they express God's presence and sorrow.

But Jesus, the human One, sanctifies our emotion. Feelings are gifts. The whole range of them.

Uncomfortable as they are, they are a release.

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I have this memory from the early days of my late husband's death, where I felt restless inside. I got busy doing things all day. But the feeling of pressure inside me built and built.

Eventually I stopped.

I went to my room. I lay down. And I said words that were given to me by a spiritual director:

Death is at work in me, but life will have the last word.

I surrendered to the restlessness and felt the inner tremor of grief. I couldn't cry. But I lay there allowing the waves to crash over me.

In that moment, I remember feeling an upward movement holding me.  
My being was slowly each day being resuscitated back to life. Day by day, week by week, year by year. Life returned.

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The story of Lazarus also has some liturgical qualities.  
Some scholars read it as a symbol of Baptism.  
At the end of John chapter 10, the writer inserts a comment that Jesus returned to the Jordan to where John was Baptising. Framing the Lazarus account.

Just as Lazarus moved from death to life, candidates of baptism, adult or children, enter the waters and rise to new life into community, the body of Christ.  
It is a sacrament - a ritual.

This ritual moves us toward hope. The invisible made visible. We dramatize our hope.

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In these times, may I invite us to live into a mature hope – where we release our clinging to what used to be, and our craving for what we think should be, where we are free to embrace the truth of what is in this moment.

Frank Ostaseski, *The Five Invitations*  
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Perhaps we will hear, Brahms' Lullaby playing.  
Amen.