

# St Thomas the Apostle Church

Take-Home Lenten Program 2011

Week V

Focus Passage: The Gospel for Sunday, March 27

**Alive!**



prepared by Adult Education in  
cooperation with the Natural Church Development  
Steering Committee

**This material is also distributed in  
our weekly church bulletin**

Welcome to the final week of our Lenten Take- Home Bible Study. We hope you have enjoyed this series. In this section you will find a final scripture passage and guidance for its consideration. There are also questions to which there are no right or wrong answers.

This week we encourage those who wish to take their study to another level to identifying themes we have examined throughout Lent. You could discuss your answers to the questions and/or your insights with a trusted friend or in a parish group or join the online discussion of our study material in our blog at

**[stthomasaltavista.blogspot.com](http://stthomasaltavista.blogspot.com)**

## Thoughts

One focus of John's gospel is revelation. In Lent this year we encounter the miraculous and the revelation of the nature of God doesn't end with individual, unconnected marvels. We begin to glimpse God's purpose. We also see changes in the wider community surrounding the people who witness Jesus' actions. We come to see His love offered to us, as individuals and to our life together. We too are offered new life.

The story of Lazarus is a very human story full of basic human questions about life and death, painful changes and God's love. Lazarus dies but he is resuscitated. Jesus called "come forth" and he obeyed. He climbed up and out through the passage from the tomb. He took a chance that there was something better waiting for him. Others helped him - they unbound him. The story does not say that those who came to commiserate left rejoicing; it says they left believing. They came to new life. This radically transformation points the way to Jesus' resurrection which goes beyond revival or recovery to rebirth.

Birth, life and death are serious things. Henri Nouwen tells a story in **Our Greatest Gift** about twins arguing in the womb. One yearns for life, freedom, light, and the face of a loving parent. The other, content with what he has, doesn't want to rock the boat and fears the birth pangs. We are faced with similar and even more difficult choices all the time. A major theme of the Old Testament - and of the New - God's people continually find themselves called into exile, a wilderness, a painful place, even death - only to discover that in passing through it they can enter into a resurrected, restored, even renewed experience of God.

We can learn from scripture that change is probably painful but it can also be an ultimately blessed passage bringing us to new life in the presence of God our Father. The lessons for today show this applying to our personal lives and to our life as a parish, especially now while we are in a time of transition. If we want our church to become the best it can be are we willing to do what it takes to "grow" ? Are we willing to change and meet the calling we have before us NOW? Is the challenge facing us "thrival" or survival? Growing means changes - some large, some small. It's not that the old ways are "bad", but that what was once useful or helpful may not be so today. We may need to make a course correction, possibly constant course corrections, to come forth as Lazarus did.

### Readings for Lent 4

*Ezekiel 37: 1-14*    *Psalm 130*

*Refrain: You have rescued my soul from death*

*Romans 8: 6-11*    **John 11: 1-45**

### This Week's Challenge:

What gives you hope? Look for signs of New Life in yourself and in the parish, then share your discoveries with someone else.


### A Prayer for Week 5


O Lord, I have not always obeyed your commandments or walked in your ways and I need your forgiveness. Bring me again, with a penitent heart and renewed faith, to cling closely to the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son. **Amen**


### Focus Passage

**John 11: 1-45** <sup>1</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup>after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup>Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup>The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." <sup>11</sup>After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." <sup>12</sup>The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." <sup>13</sup>Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup>For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup>Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." <sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." <sup>28</sup>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." <sup>29</sup>And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>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." <sup>33</sup>When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup>Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup>So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" <sup>38</sup>Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>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 four days." <sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>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." <sup>43</sup>When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>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." <sup>45</sup>Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.


## Points to Ponder

 The Gospel stories for the last 3 weeks have been long and detailed. Does that level of detail make them more or less real to you?

 What do you think was Jesus' purpose in raising Lazarus? Who did he do this for - Lazarus? Martha and Mary? Himself? God and His glory? The people? What was the effect on each of these?

 What surprised you in this reading? What does this new or surprising idea mean to you?

 Where have you encountered new life? What effect has this had on your daily life?

 Does Martha ask Jesus to raise Lazarus (Verse 22)? Do the sisters dare to believe something as radical as the raising of a dead man? Do you?