

## **“Where Have You Laid Him?”**

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)  
*Fourth in a series on “Come and See”s in the Gospel of John*

John 11:32-44

September 30, 2018

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Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

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Did any of you see Gordon Lightfoot’s concert in Elora a couple summers ago?

He’s looking pretty good for a dead guy!

See, a few years back he was driving along. On the radio came his song “If You Could Read My Mind.” He kept driving, humming along to . . . well . . . himself, enjoying the moment.

The song finished. The DJ came on, and sombrely announced they were paying tribute to Gordon Lightfoot who had just died.

After a stunned moment, Lightfoot pulled over, called the station, and let them know he was very much alive.

Still, the false rumour had already spread widely. So the next day’s newspaper in Sault Ste. Marie ran the headline, “Gordon Lightfoot is No Longer Dead!”<sup>1</sup>

What would the headline have been for Lazarus? Unlike Gordon, he had been dead! Very dead. Wrapped in a burial shroud, laid in the family tomb, closed in and shut tight. Four days dead. No doubt, dead.

Then Jesus asked, “Where have you laid him?” “Come and see,” they said.

### II

This month we’ve been listening to “Come and See” stories in John’s account of Jesus. In John’s Gospel, that invitation “Come and See” gets offered four times. We’ve already looked at the first three. In each of those, someone invites another to “Come and See” Jesus.

“Come and See” invites us to look further. It invites to look together. I’ve been imagining a park bench. You come and sit. If you’re with someone you might talk together, or maybe you just sit quietly and look around together. I’ve asked you to think of all those places

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cbc.ca/radio/undertheinfluence/the-day-gordon-lightfoot-died-then-came-back-to-life-1.4604390](http://www.cbc.ca/radio/undertheinfluence/the-day-gordon-lightfoot-died-then-came-back-to-life-1.4604390)  
<https://www.sootoday.com/local-news/gordon-lightfoot-is-no-longer-dead-440-pm-update-128540>

where you go through the week, and imagine a park bench there.

Jesus is on the bench. Wherever you go, Jesus is already there. He invites you over. *“Come and see,” he says. “See what I’m seeing. See people as I am seeing them. See what I am doing. See how you can be part of it.”*

When you are seeing with Jesus, you can invite others to come and see with you. Together, you can discover Jesus. He teaches us together to be with him, and to see with him.

However, this last “Come and See” is different. Those in the story — Mary, Martha, their friends and neighbours — they make their invitation *to Jesus*. They ask Jesus to “Come and See” with them. *Come and see where we’ve laid the body of our dead Lazarus.*

What can you ask Jesus to “Come and See?”

### III

Can you ask Jesus to come and see your sorrow?

All they had left of their dearly-loved Lazarus was a stone-closed tomb. All the life that was Lazarus, all the vitality that was Lazarus, all the joy and pleasure, all the presence that was Lazarus was gone. All that was left was in there, behind the rock, in the tomb.

Still, they had that. Why do many of us still go to the grave, years later? It is what we have. That, and our sorrow.

What is your sorrow, which you can ask Jesus to “come and see?”

Maybe it is sorrow from someone’s death. But it doesn’t have to be. Yours can be any sorrow, any wound, any grief, any pain. It can be sorrow over something done to you. It can be sorrow over something you’ve done. Yours might be sorrow from disappointment, a failed dream, a deflated hope. It can be sorrow for our world, for something you’ve heard about, for God’s creation at risk.

Whatever it is, what sorrows you have, can you invite Jesus to “come and see?”

Sorrow easily isolates us. People start passing us by on the other side, maybe because they don’t know what to say. Maybe our pain reminds them of theirs. Maybe they know they can’t fix us, and we are not so good at being together without trying to fix each other.

Sorrow easily isolates us. That’s why well-meant phrases like, “I understand” or “I know what you’re going through” don’t quite work. No one else can really know. No one else can fully understand. Each relationship lost is unique. Each suffering endured is particular.

Don't sit beside me to cheer me up. Or distract me. Or make it better. Please, put away those pious phrases. Don't try to explain it. You can't and, really, explanations usually don't work. Don't try to get me past it. I can't. I won't.

Just, sit beside me. "Come and see" me in my sorrow.

Can you ask Jesus to come and see?

#### IV

Let me just put my cards on the table. I know Jesus will "come and see" with you. Please ask him.

I believe Jesus is not simply someone from the distant past. He is alive and with us now. In the way we Christians usually express it, Jesus is "the Son" who, with the One he called "Father" and with the "Holy Spirit, is one God. That's a blowing-our-mind mystery, and that's God! You don't need theological expertise to know that wherever God is, Jesus is. Which is everywhere.

Including where we sit, in our sorrow.

I emphasize this because it means that Jesus shows us what God is like. We no longer have to guess or speculate. In Jesus, we see God. When we see how Jesus went about things while he was physically present among people, we can confidently know how God is going about things now.

He comes and sits beside us in our sorrow. And, as we saw in the story, Jesus weeps. He shares our sorrow. He carries it with us, so we don't have to carry it alone.

#### V

But then there is the "what else" Jesus does. He calls Lazarus back to life.

Now, so there are no misunderstandings, I'm not recommending we all race to local cemeteries, sit and wait eagerly (or fearfully, if we've seen too many graveyard horror movies). Yes, because Jesus was raised from the dead, and because that was the down-payment on the resurrection of all creation, I trust that God will raise the dead. I have no idea how, nor what it will be like, and certainly not when — I'm willing to trust those things to God. Until then, though, I'm happy to walk through cemeteries without expecting to be interrupted.

But in all things, especially in my sorrows, I expect Jesus to surprise me.

When we invite Jesus to "come and see," we are welcoming the One who is making all things new. Jesus, the One who, no matter the wound, gives healing that is strong and powerful. Jesus, the One who, no matter the guilt, gives forgiveness that is reviving and

complete. Jesus, the One who, no matter the disappointment, the despair, gives hope that is sure. Jesus, the One who, no matter how weak we are, how broken, how done-in and walked over, has the strength to hold us, to lift us, to carry us.

Jesus, the One who, no matter what we expect, will surprise us.

Such are the ways of God, the strength of God, the abiding presence and overflowing love of God.

They showed Jesus where they'd laid Lazarus, and said "Come and see." They needed Jesus to share their sorrow with them, and he did. They had no idea what he was going to do next.

Neither do we, when we say to him, "Come and See."

Praise be to God! Amen.