It seems that one of our societal preoccupations is with the aging. As a dermatologist told one of her clients, *after* her procedures did not work, *“Don’t you know you have begun your journey chasing youth."*  To which the client responded, *“I have no intention of chasing youth, just fix it so I can move on with my life as I was -- young with perfectly clear, tight skin.”*

It seems there are some people who are in denial! On one hand, they acknowledge the process of growing older, but they still want to look young and do what they can to extend their life span. There are also those scientists and vendors who are promising us some form of immortality.

People do not like to talk about death. Some even have the irrational belief that maybe they can get out of life alive! However, there are those who know their time is limited. They see every stage of their lives full of meaning and purpose.

I believe there are many of us who are fixated with questions of eternal life and our meaning. In one way or another we often think about the meaning of life in the face of our perishing.

I once read a story about a group who had been lost at sea. Their potential death caused them to talk about what they would regret not doing if they knew when they were going to die. As it is with such times, it was a reflection on what was important, what was lost, and what meaning could they give to their lives.

John’s narrative is about such reflections. First there is the bargaining when death appears at our door step. We might say we would act differently if we were rescued from our fear. We could even make God our heavenly “body guard” or “sentinel” against all harm and danger. And when God failed to deliver on those responsibilities and someone died too soon, our lament would lead to his dismissal as our Divine protector.

Hear the hints of this in Martha and Mary. Jesus hears about his friend and yet he does not rush to the bed side. He turns up too late and, I believe, Mary and Martha are dismayed with his lack of response. John is telling us that there is another agenda at work. This is a hard teaching - this waiting.

Thus we ask what is going on here? What is the different agenda John is telling us? First we notice that this is resuscitation. Lazarus is beginning to stink to high heaven. So Jesus calls him out of the tomb. But Lazarus will still die. This is not immortality! This is not resurrection! It is reminder that despite all attempts to deny death, we do die! The question before us is what we will do with the time that has been allotted to us?

This Lazarus story is preparing us for the next episode. Jesus is going on to Jerusalem to die. And the narrator reminds us that Jesus' agenda is one of faithfulness to kingdom values—such as compassion, forgiveness, faith, humility, and servanthood! It was those values that guided him even when he knew what was coming!

John wants us to remember that resurrection is what God does not something we can do. Our home in God is a gift. We are not on a course of eternal return because of good behavior. But we are freed from the fear of death - freed from seeking immortality by trying to earn it. We are to live fully now in our time and space without any necessary reward in the future.

Resurrection is not only an end-time promise, but it is God’s activity of redeeming us to further God's work with our hands now. What gives us identity is the fact we are called to live fully in the present. What defines us is how we live. Our meaning comes by our full participation in the issues of our time.

The Lazarus story calls into question the agenda of denying our own imminent death and trying to extend our days. It focuses on what is crucial for this living.

Last month our sister in Christ, LJ Rule died. Her life was dedicated to living! And this living well was part of her legacy. Even in her restricted state she gave her life away in acts of compassion and love.

Living out of the resurrection is an attitude that faces the fact that life is continuously one of perishing. We die every day. Life wears us down. Mishaps, challenges and often tragedy come our way! We need resurrection to help us not only cope but to constantly revive and transform us. Maybe this kind of transformation can enable us to find those activities that can uplift us and at the same time make a difference in the lives of others.

We have been claimed by God and in each day we are redeemed. With the Spirit breathed into us, fear is not the last word! With Jesus we are raised to let loose of those grave clothes, the fears that often bind us. We have been called out of our self-imposed tombs! And mere resuscitation will not do! Resurrection is the only power that can move us beyond the behaviors that deny our finiteness. The Spirit is what gives our life both meaning and purpose!

 Finally, in our second lesson, Paul articulates the good news that lingers just beyond Lent: *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."*  We are now freed to live gladly, for we believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Not even death.