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## *Oh, The Places You'll Go!*

**A sermon by Canon George Maxwell**  
**All Saints Sunday – Year B**

“Unbind him and let him go.”

With these words, the last vestiges of death dropped from the body of Lazarus and he stepped into a new life.

Jesus had changed water into wine. He had changed a young boy's lunch into enough food to feed an army of people. He had changed a man born blind into one who could see. But now, he had changed a man dead for four days into one who was alive.

The news spread quickly. Many believed in Jesus and they were eager to tell others what he had done. Lazarus became a celebrity.

We are told that when Jesus shared the Passover meal with Mary, Martha and Lazarus at their home in Bethany, crowds of Jews came there not only to see Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

So many people came to see Jesus on account of Lazarus that the chief priests planned to put both of them to death.

We know what happened to Jesus, but don't you wonder what ever happened to Lazarus?

Although scripture is silent, tradition takes Lazarus to places he would have never thought of going.

An eastern tradition tells us that Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, went to Cyprus and settled in a city on the southern coast. Lazarus became a bishop of the church and performed several miracles. After his death, Lazarus' bones were taken to Constantinople and after the fall of Constantinople, they were transported to Marseilles in France.

A western tradition claims that Lazarus and his sisters were put out to sea in a boat without oars. They wound up in Marseilles, where Lazarus became a bishop of the church and performed several miracles. Ultimately, Lazarus was martyred in one of the Roman persecutions.

I imagine that Lazarus travelled to places inside of himself that he never thought of going either.

It can't have been easy to be he guy Jesus raised from the dead.

It would be like always wanting to be a writer and then watching your first book become a run away best seller. You would be wildly excited, of course. But then, once you caught your breath, you might start to wonder if you would ever write anything anybody cared about again. You might start to worry that everything else you wrote would become known as the thing that came after your greatest work. You might start to find it hard to write at all.

This is how Elizabeth Gilbert described the state of her soul after she experienced the unexpected success of *Eat, Pray, Love*. She decided that she had to put some distance between herself and her anxiety, so she reached back to an ancient understanding of creativity. Creativity, she reasoned, was something given to you by divine spirits.

This understanding of creativity as a gift freed her from the deadly grip of her fear of failure.

It's a mistake, she says, to think that genius is something that only a rare person is. Genius is something that all of us have. And, it's not always up to us whether our genius will produce a great book or not. All we can do is write the book we are supposed to write.

I heard a similar story about finding your own voice in an interview with another author, Lisa Brennan-Jobs. Her memoir, *Small Fry*, has just been released.

The book is about the relationship between Brennan-Jobs and her famous father, Steve Jobs.

She said that she wanted to write another book. She didn't want to write a book about her father when so much had already been written about him. But, their story just kept coming up.

She decided that she couldn't tell another story until she learned how to tell that one.

As she was writing the book, she sent drafts to her publisher and friends. The common complaint was that they couldn't find her in the work. She seemed to slowly disappear from the pages.

She decided that she would stop trying to write a universal coming of age story and focus on the particular story of her often tortured and finally reconciled relationship with her father.

The book has received critical acclaim. Reviewers have noted that they didn't necessarily learn anything new about Steve Jobs, but they did come to see him in a more visceral way because she is in the picture.

These are the places that I imagine Lazarus had to go.

He had to overcome a fear of never rising above the fame he had already received, and he had to find himself in the context of his relationship with the one who had given him life.

And these are the places that Christ invites us to go as well.

Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection is just the beginning.

It's not like taking a trip in the car, though. You can't get where you are going simply by starting on the right road, obeying all of the signs and signals, and making all of the right turns.

It's more like a hike in the mountains. What you will need to take with you will depend on when, with whom, and by what route you travel. You can count on God being a constant companion, but you should also expect that you will have to do your share of the work, like operating a compass and negotiating the elements.

But, you don't have to take my word for it.

I offer you the words (slightly edited, I confess) of one of my favorite theologians ... Dr. Seuss!

### **Oh, the Places You'll Go!**

Congratulations!  
Today is your day.  
You're off to Great Places!  
You're off and away!

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
any direction you choose.

Have no fear.

You will never be alone.  
Jesus is near.  
Always calling you home.

And you will succeed  
Yes! You will indeed.  
Remember who you are  
And it's all guaranteed.

KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!

So ...  
be your name Saxon, or Shepherd, or Lillian, or Thomas,  
Charles, or Elizabeth, or even Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea,  
you're off to great places!

Today is your day!

Your mountain is waiting.  
Just follow the way!

Amen.