

**The Reverend Dr. Randall K. Bush**  
**East Liberty Presbyterian Church**  
**March 25, 2012**  
**John 11:45-54**  
**“The Myth of Quick Fixes”**

You’ve just heard the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and a short description of what happened next. Jesus visited the tomb of his deceased friend, where he encountered Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary. He tells them, *I am the resurrection and the life. Everyone who believes in me will never die.* He then called forth Lazarus from the tomb and told the crowd to unbind him from his burial cloths. Hesitant, likely in shock, this mixture of family and friends slowly moved forward to encounter the now-living Lazarus. They unwrapped the cloths from the man they’d only recently wrapped and laid in a tomb. They removed the cloth from his head so that his eyes once more blinked in the light and saw those whom he loved. The crowd could then embrace the man they’d believed they would never embrace again. And, in that moment, they likely hugged one another in wonder, in amazement, in new found faith. *Key point:* At Lazarus’ tomb, the people were drawn together around Christ, and in that act, they all were made fully alive.

Now we leave that scene for a moment and consider what happened next, about a mile and a half away behind closed doors in the city of Jerusalem. Scripture says that after Lazarus was raised, some people went to the Jewish leaders and told them what Jesus had done. Not what Jesus had *said*, but what he had done. They didn’t tell the chief priests how Martha called Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God; they didn’t tell the scribes and temple leaders that Jesus had said he was the resurrection and the life. No, they only told what Jesus did, how he had worked a miracle, a crowd had seen it, and now believed in him. The subtext in their reporting was easy to guess: This outsider was making a name for himself, which Rome would hear about and get nervous about and possibly act on in such a way that all of them would be at risk. The holy temple, the positions of privilege enjoyed by a few Jewish leaders – all this would be swept away as if in a dream if Rome felt threatened by a Jewish, Messianic rabble-rouser.

In that moment, Caiaphas knew something needed to be done. He felt compelled to act and to act quickly. So he made his preferences known: *It is better for one man to die for the people than to have our whole nation destroyed.* Caiaphas went for the quick fix. He told the others: Don’t ask questions; don’t think through other options. Look for an easy way out. Choose the quick fix.

We all have these Caiaphas moments, because frankly we all love quick fixes. They may happen in different settings and from different motivations, but they all seek to avoid what is the best choice for the long term. *Example:* quick fixes are big on denial. You or someone you love says, “I’ve had this nagging pain in my arm or my



chest. It's probably just heartburn or a muscle strain. I'll take some Tylenol and it will be better tomorrow." How many of you have heard this said or said it yourself? Quick fixes are dangerously big on denial.

*Example:* Quick fixes love easy answers and, even better, easy money. State governments love easy money; and there are few sources of easy money better than from casinos. In 2010, guess which state took in the most money from casinos: Nevada, with its Las Vegas showgirls? New Jersey, with its Atlantic City boardwalk? No, Pennsylvania did, taking in \$1.3 billion from slots and table games. Statistically about 15% of the population hates gambling, while 85% tolerate it or condone it; so more and more states now offer it, regardless of the human cost and wasting of people's limited resources on rigged games of chance. Former Governor Ed Rendell had his famous outburst last year on *60 Minutes*, in which he shouted at Leslie Stahl, *Look, those people would lose that money anyway. You're simpletons; you're idiots if you don't get that.*<sup>1</sup> Casino money can do some good, but relying on such resources is neither healthy nor sustainable for the long-term. It's a quick fix.

*Example:* Quick fixes are big on simplistic answers. Migration patterns of people who leave their home to find work or a better future in another area are troubling to many people; so governments employ quick fixes like putting up walls. Ask Mark Adams about the social and personal impact inflicted on families by the wall we've chosen to erect along the U.S.-Mexican border. Ask about the \$4 billion in cost to erect 700 miles of 17 foot high fences of steel mesh out in the desert, whose main impact does not stop illegal crossings of the U.S. border but only increases the personal risks and dehumanizing hardship faced by the people who cross anyway and are quickly hired on this side of the fence to pick produce, clean pools, roof houses, and tend gardens. Robert Frost was right: *Something there is that doesn't love a wall. (Mending Wall)* Whether erected in Texas or Jerusalem or wherever, walls are simplistic, flawed, quick fixes when we refuse to invest in finding real answers to the questions of how to live together faithfully.

*Example:* Quick fixes are sustained by stereotypes and fear. Demonize and stereotype those who are different and suddenly all sorts of injustices become possible. The recent case involving the homicide of Florida youth Trayvon Martin illustrates this pattern. The broad details of this tragic event involve a neighbor claiming that Martin was suspicious-looking, based primarily on his black skin color and his wearing a hoodie sweatshirt; so he calls 911 and eventually shoots the young man, but walks away from the scene unarrested because of a Florida law that grants immunity to anyone who claims they "stood their ground" and were only defending themselves against attack. This supposed attack involved a 17-year old carrying Skittles and a can of iced tea. This attack shows how dangerous it can still be in America not only to drive while black, or shop while black, but now just to walk while black. As if last year's Pittsburgh case of Jordan Miles, the CAPA honor student beaten by undercover police officers while only carrying a bottle of Mountain Dew,



wasn't enough proof of this danger! Twenty-three states have this "Stand Your Ground" type law; thankfully not Pennsylvania, though. But the persistent evidence about these types of racial profiling and senseless acts of violence against people of color, people of different ethnicities and sexual orientations, is all around us; and these incidents are fresh wounds daily inflicted on the body of Christ that is our community and nation.

All the examples I described are messy: casino gambling, border patrols, racial profiling, irrational gun laws, which is precisely why quick fixes are so tempting. They offer easy outs to avoid dealing with the messiness of life. Better that Pennsylvania profit from casinos than allow other states to get all the wealth. Better that one child be gunned down, one miracle worker from Nazareth be crucified than an entire nation have to come to terms with what is God's true will for our life together.

Quick fixes are all around us, just as they were all around Jerusalem during those last days of Jesus' life. Caiaphas gave voice to one quick fix: Let one man die lest the whole nation be at risk. Pilate offered a quick fix when he asked for a bowl of water and literally washed his hands of Jesus' fate, as if that could absolve him of all responsibility for Jesus' death. The soldiers enjoyed quick fixes as they humiliated Jesus, mocking him, whipping him, and gambling for his purple cloak. The disciples, too, took the quick fix of running away and hiding, denying and disavowing their Lord.

When Jesus himself reflected on the events that were soon to come, he used these words, as recorded in John 12: *Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* (Jn 12:31-32). I wish I had a quick fix for quick fixes, a simple answer for the messiness and complications of this life. I don't, but what I do have, I will freely give to you. Quick fixes are always about disengaging. Faithful living is always about engaging, connecting, coming together. Jesus promises that as he is lifted up – sacrificially on the cross, miraculously on Easter morning – he will draw all people to himself. You and I and all people will be brought together, finding strength and healing and life together in Christ. The answer is not to be found in quick fixes of individualism, of gun laws claiming a man's home is his inviolable castle, of walls to keep us separate and unequal, or of prejudices and stereotypes that thrive on racism and fear. The answer is found in what Dr. King called a "beloved community," a sacrificial community that seeks the best for all, for all are loved by God.



Remember the key point from today's story. Jesus called forth Lazarus from the tomb and told the crowd to unbind him. Hesitant, likely in shock, the mixture of family and friends slowly moved forward to encounter the now-living Lazarus. They removed the cloth from his head so that his eyes once more blinked in the light and saw those he loved. They embraced the man they'd believed they would never embrace again; and in that moment, they likely hugged one another in wonder, in amazement, in new found faith. At Lazarus' tomb, the people were drawn together around Christ, and in that act, they were all made truly alive. Christ, being lifted from the grave, draws all people together: and in that act, we, too, become fully alive. Everything else is denial, and disengagement, and just a quick fix.

AMEN

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. "A Big Bet Gone Bad", Michael Sokolove, *New York Times Magazine*, March 18, 2012, p.40.

