

**Problem: What moves Jesus to action in this text?**

-The Malheur Lumber Co. mill is located in the town of John Day, OR. Population: 1,700. The mill and town were entrenched in vicious battles between “logging companies and environmentalists”. As the classic story usually goes in communities such as this in the USA, the lumber company wanted to log and the environmentalists were concerned the logging was not being done in a responsible way. Lawsuits were thrown, mistrust was had, and the Malheur Lumber Co. Mill was about to be shut down in 2014. That is, until the once enemy sides were driven to meet each other by the possible devastation of this small town’s economy and way of life. Among the friendships that were formed was the friendship of Mike Billman, timber buyer for the Malheur Lumber Co. mill, and conservationist Tim Lillebo. “We were determined to do something,” Lillebo recalls. After multiple meetings, discussions on possible collaborations, and even camping trips together, the two discovered a common goal: a realization that wildfires posed as big a threat to the forests as logging. And the way to protect the forests was to work together to approve projects which thinned overgrown stands while providing enough logs to keep the local mill running. The atmosphere of trust and respect had reached such a point that when Bilman decided Malheur Lumber had to shut down in 2012, Lillebo and members of the collaborative were able to act. They quickly signed off on delayed forest-thinning projects and developed logging plans that could sustain the mill. This past year, the Malheur Mill hired 30 people and the forests in this little community are being looked after for future generations.

-Lillebo and Billman came together not because they were “sad for their community”, but because they were agitated or fired up. They were frustrated by the status quo of “conservationists and loggers” and wanted to move forward in a new way.

-Our gospel story of Jesus raising Lazarus has some similar overtones to it that are crucial to the story, but may be missed in our reading of it.

-”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.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep.”

-The greek words that are translated as Jesus was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved” are *embrimaomai* and *tarassó*. The first one meaning “frustrated, angry, or agitated” and the second one meaning “stirred up, or moved to action”. I have also heard it translated as “Jesus was stormy”. Whatever way you look at it, it seems that Jesus was much more than just “sad a Lazarus’ death”, but actually agitated in a unique way. What was Jesus agitated by?

**Solution: Jesus, unlike common interpretation which sees him as “sad”, is actually “agitated” and “frustrated”.**

-Maybe, like Mike Billman and Tim Lillebo, he was frustrated by the “same old status quo”. Jesus asked: “Where have you laid him? [The Jewish leadership] said ‘come and see.’” This is interesting to me. Do any bible geeks recognize where “come and see” also appears in the gospel of John? This exact phrase occurs when Jesus calls his disciples and they ask: “where do you abide? Come and see.” Clearly in the context of the disciples, Jesus is using this phrase and something to show life, love, and a new way of being. Come and see what God is up to could be another way of looking at it. In contrast, the Jewish leadership uses this exact same phrase but they seem to mean something quite different. Come and see where Lazarus, this dead man, lies. Come and see where death resides. You see Jesus? This man is dead and there is nothing your “God powers” can do about it.

-Yes, I do believe Jesus is mourning his friend Lazarus and the weeping of his sister Mary. Any sudden death or the “taking of a life” is something God weeps for. But I also read this story as one that shows utter frustration and agitation. Jesus is agitated by the fact that these leaders which claim to “profess a faith in a living God” keep pointing at the same old death. It’s the same close minded, cut-off, status-quo and Jesus is saying: come on! You don’t get it!!

**Implication: Agitation can move to new possibilities, new life.**

-Now if you come from a more Scandinavian background like me (and like many Lutherans), this might be a little challenging to hear. I know showing “agitation” is not something that is natural to me or many members of my family. Agitation or anger are uncomfortable and not accepted in many ways throughout our culture.

-However, notice importantly that Jesus’ anger is not a “lashing out” or destructive type. -” When Jesus had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out.”

-Come and see God’s real work in this world: life. Jesus’ agitation opens him up to showing life once again.

-We live in a world of log jams and status quo. I think we hear a lot from various sources: “Come and see the same old same old, come and see closed off possibilities, come and see death.” To be honest, this gets me agitated. Enough is enough sometimes with the status quo. Jesus gives us permission in this story to feel: enough is enough!

-Agitation has a place and is important. But it’s how we focus it that is really important. Is our anger, frustration, and agitation going to close us off (lashing out) or open us up (calling Lazarus out of the tomb) to a new reality and possibilities?

-In my prayers this week, I will pray for all of us in our grief, sadness, need of healing and hope. But I’m also going to pray for our agitation: that it may lead us (in a healthy way) to demand life and openness from each other, our world, and our God who is hard at work. Amen.

