

Lent 5 2026

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God who reveals Godself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our relationship with time is very much shaped by the cultures that shape us. Different cultures have different understandings and relationships with time. In Switzerland, where I grew up, if one doesn't turn up at least five to ten minutes early to a meeting, one is considered late. But I have also had the privilege of living in Guinea, West Africa, and because I have family in Uganda, I regularly spend time there as well. In both countries to turn up at six, when invited to a party at six, would be silly, no one will be there yet, better to arrive a couple hours later, and one is perfectly on time. In Uganda I have been taught that if we are to meet at nine, that means any-time between nine and nine-fifty-nine is perfectly on time. And here in England I had to learn that turning up ten minutes early to a dinner invitation is borderline rude.

Different cultures view time differently and have different relationships with time. Having had the joy in living in some very multi-cultural communities I have also occasionally experienced how our different views and relationships with time can cause tensions and misunderstandings, but the truth is I have found strengths in all the different relationships with time. Some might seem strange to us, due to our own cultural backgrounds, but at the end of the day they aren't right or wrong, they are just different.

And then there is God and time. God who has all the time in the world. God who created time. God who is not bound by time. We might sometimes struggle to understand the way other cultures handle time, either always

being in a hurry, never having time, or seemingly never being in a hurry, always having time. But what about God's timing? What about Jesus' timing when he hears that his friend Lazarus is very seriously ill? Jesus just lets time get away from him, not at all responding with the urgency the situation requires. Given that there was clearly a risk to his life if he went to Judea, that is somewhat understandable. Except, then suddenly when it's already too late, Lazarus already dead and buried, Jesus decides to throw caution to the wind and turn up anyway.

And both Martha and Mary assure Jesus that they are certain he could have healed their brother if he had turned up in time. But he didn't, he stayed where he was until it was too late.

Except he wasn't, because God's plan wasn't to heal Lazarus, but to let Lazarus become a foreshadowing sign for Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning, as Jesus in his usual, somewhat mysterious way tells the disciples:

'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'

And indeed, as Jesus calls Lazarus, whose body had already begun to smell, Lazarus comes back to life and walks out of the grave. Jesus moved and acted on God's timing and that timing can be rather bewildering for us. As human beings we have a very different relationship to time. Our time on Earth is not endless, sooner or later we all will die and during our life time our bodies dictate regularly our needs for sleep, food, water and rest. Our experience of time is shaped by the regular need for these basic things.

God on the other hand only experienced these needs when the Son of God, Jesus, became one of us, also in need of sleep, food, water and rest. God's

time is without beginning or end, limitless. God's understanding of time and God's relationship with time is very different to ours, no matter what cultures have shaped our understanding of time and our relationship with time. Jesus' response to the news of his dear friend Lazarus being seriously ill is a glimpse into how differently God understands and relates to time.

Our understanding and relationship with time is very limited, no matter the cultures that might have broadened and deepened our understanding of time and how we relate to it. We will never fully understand God's timing, because from where we stand it will likely often make as little sense as Jesus waiting until it was too late to go and visit his friend Lazarus. But sometimes, not very often, we might get a glimpse, that maybe God's timing is not wrong, but simply very different. Like when Lazarus walks out of the grave as a sign that Jesus too will walk out of the grave.

We likely all have moments in our lives where we do not understand God's timing, why God didn't act when we called for help. And I am afraid I am unable to explain God's timing in ways that would make that ok. There are times when God's timing stays a mystery to us, times when with the best will in the world, we cannot understand God with our limited understanding and relationship with time. And as the Psalms, the book of Job and the story of Lazarus show us, it is ok for us to be angry with God, to honestly pour out our thoughts and feelings as we wonder why God didn't act in time, as we see and understand it. Even Jesus wept at Lazarus' grave, even Jesus cried out on the cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The question is, are we willing to trust, despite not fully understanding, that God's timing is right and always shaped by God's love and care for us? Amen.