

Rev. Dan Welch Lent 5 3-22-26 Text: John 11:1-45

Lazarus lives again! Mary and Martha are overjoyed! The people are amazed! What an incredible miracle! But did you notice how little time John gives to the actual miracle, to Lazarus coming out of the tomb? Two little verses at the end. “Lazarus, come out,” Jesus commands (v 43). Lazarus appears. Jesus tells them to take off the burial clothes. That’s it. You’d think the miracle would get a little more attention than that. Unless... John has something *bigger* in mind, something *deeper*, something *more* for us to focus on.

Let’s listen to what Jesus has to say in verses 14 and 15: “Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” Then in verses 25 and 26: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” Finally, in verses 41 and 42: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

Did you catch what John wants to happen? He wants us who are reading this centuries later to **believe**: to believe in **Jesus**, to believe that the Father sent Him to be the resurrection and the life. Yes, a lot is going on here about what faith **does** and what we **believe** as a result.

Faith **Does** and Faith **Believes**. So, let's go back and linger a few moments on this account of Mary, Martha, and the raising of Lazarus.

Lazarus is sick. Really, really sick. No doctor or medicine can do anything for him. He is going to die. Mary and Martha know their only hope is for Jesus to do something. So, they send a message to Him. A simple message: "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (v 3). Maybe the messenger filled in more details. Maybe the sisters thought Jesus would realize how serious things were because they sent Him this message. But they asked Him. They wanted Jesus to come and do something for them. They wanted Jesus to show up.

Faith leads us to do just that. We pray. We ask Jesus to do something when things get really, really tough. We want Him to show up.

When have **you** prayed like this? A family member who is seriously ill. A relationship that's gone bad. A time of great anxiety or fear that overwhelms you. Depression is ruining your life. You've run into deep financial troubles, and you can't see any way out. You need Jesus to show up, so you ask Him to do something.

Why do Mary and Martha ask Him to come? Why do **we** ask Him for help? Because faith leads us to believe that Jesus hears our prayers, to believe that He shows up when we need Him, to believe that He will do something in our most desperate moments of life. Faith asks, and we believe that Jesus will somehow answer those prayers.

But Jesus doesn't go to Lazarus right away. He waits a couple of days before heading out. The timing is significant. When Jesus arrives at the funeral, Lazarus has already been dead four days. Do the math. One day for the messenger to get there. Two days' wait. One day for Jesus and His disciples to travel to Mary and Martha's. Since they were using Jewish counting, that means Lazarus died on the day Jesus got the message, and Jesus knew He was dead. But more is going on. The belief back then was

that four days signified someone was definitely dead. No hope for a revival. No chance a mistake had been made. The body was decomposing and should be relegated to a tomb where the odor could be kept at bay. In Mary and Martha's eyes, Jesus didn't get there in time. He waited too long. Their reaction is understandable. Both say the same thing, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (vv 21, 32). Do you hear the emotions going on when they say this? Honest emotions. The words have a hint of rebuke in them. "You didn't come when we asked you. Now he's dead." You can hear some confusion: "Why didn't You come right away? We don't understand why You waited so long." And then their voices betray regret and resignation. "Lazarus is dead. We're hurting. We'd be much better if You had come and made him healthy again."

Rebuke, confusion, regret. These are *honest* emotions. Faith *reacts* to what happens in our lives, just like it did for Mary and Martha. But faith also *believes*. Did you hear what Martha said? "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you" (v 22). *Whatever*. Whatever

God decides. In a way, she's saying that whatever you do and whenever you do it, it's your decision and your timing. I trust you.

A contemporary Christian band, Mercy Me, sings the song "Even If". The singer speaks of how the sorrow and hurt would all go away *if* God just stretched out His mighty hand. The song acknowledges that a little faith can move mountains, but he says all he has is just a little faith. Then comes the chorus, which cries out what is believed: "But even if you don't, my hope is you alone." The singer says the Lord has been faithful, so he'll cling to Him *even if* he doesn't stretch out His hand in the way it's wanted.

Faith reacts *honestly*, but we still believe that Jesus will do whatever is *needed* and in *His* time. We still trust and hope in Him.

Mary and Martha then watch as Jesus goes into action. They see His righteous anger at what death does to those He loves. He is deeply troubled. I imagine His face turning hard and stern, His fists clenched. He looks directly at this great enemy called death, and at death's evil henchmen of sickness, grief, fear, anxiety, depression, hurt, hardship, loss,

and pain. He is furious. The time has come to do something about this ancient foe who brings such devastation to people, to you and me.

Next, they see a different side of Jesus. They watch Him weep. He's not crying because Lazarus died. He knows He'll bring him back to life in a couple of minutes. No, He weeps because His heart goes out to the sisters. He cries because He is fully human and feels our pain. Even though He knows that Lazarus will live again, that death will be defeated and eternal life will be won, He still cries at the sadness that invades our lives. He weeps with us.

(Show screen with meme) This meme I found captures it well:

“He cried. He knew Lazarus was dead before He got the news. But still, He cried. He knew Lazarus would be alive again in moments but still, He cried. He knew death here is not forever. He knew eternity and the Kingdom better than anyone else could, yet He wept. Because this world is full of pain and regret and loss and depression and devastation, He wept because knowing the end of the story doesn't mean you can't cry at the sad parts.”

What happens next makes their eyes grow wide with amazement.

Jesus orders the tomb to be opened. The odor makes no difference to Him.

He calls out his name: “Lazarus!” He commands him, “Come out!” Lazarus

breathes again. His legs move. The burial cloths are removed. Lazarus lives. Jesus has authority even over death itself.

Now, that seems to be the end of the story. But it's not. John goes on to say that while some believe, others go and tell the religious leaders. The Pharisees and chief priests react in a different way. They see Jesus growing in popularity and fear that the Romans will come and take away their power and prestige. So, they plot for Jesus's death. Caiaphas, the high priest, even speaks a word of expediency that is actually a prophecy, that it is better that one man die for the people, and not that the whole nation perish.

In other words, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection has been set in motion. The time has come for Jesus to die for the sins of the whole world, not just the nation. The time has come for Jesus to reveal who He is as the one who would take on death head on. His glory is to show His heart of love and compassion. He would die at death's hands and be put in a tomb. But again, that is not the end of the story. He is the resurrection. He is the life. *(Show slide of the glory cross from the children's message.)* Jesus'

words now make a promise that is forever true. “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (vv 25–26).

Faith watches what Jesus *does* and *believes* He is the resurrection and the life. Like Martha, like the children, it is time for us to confess what we believe. Say it with me: (Show screen) “Yes, Lord, I believe you are the resurrection and the life.” Amen.