

Now a man was sick, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair, and it was her brother Lazarus who was sick. ³So the sisters sent a message to him: “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

⁴When Jesus heard it, he said, “This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” ⁵Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was. ⁷Then after that, he said to the disciples, “Let’s go to Judea again.”

⁸“Rabbi,” the disciples told him, “just now the Jews tried to stone you, and you’re going there again?”

⁹“Aren’t there twelve hours in a day?” Jesus answered. “If anyone walks during the day, he doesn’t stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰But if anyone walks during the night, he does stumble, because the light is not in him.”

¹¹He said this, and then he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I’m on my way to wake him up.”

¹²Then the disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will get well.”

¹³Jesus, however, was speaking about his death, but they thought he was speaking about natural sleep. ¹⁴So Jesus then told them plainly, “Lazarus has died. ¹⁵I’m glad for you that I wasn’t there so that you may believe. But let’s go to him.”

¹⁶Then Thomas (called “Twin”^[a]) said to his fellow disciples, “Let’s go too so that we may die with him.”

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem (less than two miles^[b] away). ¹⁹Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.

²⁰As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. ²²Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”

²³“Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her.

²⁴Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.”

²⁸Having said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”

²⁹As soon as Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw that Mary got up quickly and went out. They followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to cry there.

³²As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”

³³When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved^[c] in his spirit and troubled. ³⁴“Where have you put him?” he asked.

“Lord,” they told him, “come and see.”

³⁵Jesus wept.

³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Couldn’t he who opened the blind man’s eyes also have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹“Remove the stone,” Jesus said.

Martha, the dead man’s sister, told him, “Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days.”

⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. ⁴² I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.” ⁴³ After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

⁴⁵ Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he did believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and were saying, “What are we going to do since this man is doing many signs? ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

⁴⁹ One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You’re not considering that it is to your^[d] advantage that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish.” ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to kill him.

Did you die?

But, did you die? Is a snarky way of replying to someone, indirectly implying that what they are complaining about is really of no importance. What you went through isn’t really that big of a deal now, was it? Did you die? In other words, there are worse things that could happen to you, like death. So what if your cell phone doesn’t work, the internet is down, or God forbid GPS isn’t working. Did you die?

Jesus said it first and it sounds a bit callous coming from his mouth. It’s almost as if he is downplaying death. He compares it to sleep. He then promises, *“This sickness will not end in death”* but Lazarus dies. Mary and Martha are weeping and Jesus asks, “Did Lazarus die?” Not eternally. Death is usually a big deal but not when the one who holds the power over life and death is standing before you. Did you die? No, but if you did there is one who can do something about it and does.

That same promise made to Lazarus, Mary, and Martha is the same promise God has made to us. He who believes in me will never die. This sickness, the pain, the day to day struggle, will not end in death. Jesus puts life and death into perspective for us even demonstrating that we have nothing to fear, not even death itself. Did you die? No, but Jesus did for me. Even at a funeral a Christian can still proclaim, “Did you die?” And the answer is, “In Christ... Never!”

But Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, was critically ill, but not technically dead. During that time Mary and Martha send an urgent message to one who can help and they’re prayers don’t seem to be heard. They expect Jesus to come immediately to take away the pain, to take away the sickness, and restore all in their world. But instead Jesus deliberately delays two days. This is breach of pastoral duty – he doesn’t show up. He doesn’t pray for them. He doesn’t comfort them. He even misses the funeral. He isn’t that far from Bethany and Jesus disciples don’t seem to be upset about the delay. Last time they were in that area the Judeans tried to stone Jesus with rocks. To go back to Bethany was a death sentence. But Thomas is willing to go and even die with Jesus.

As soon as Martha heard she ran out to Jesus. *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.”* Talk about a greeting, “Great to see you too, Martha.” She’s hurting. Her brother has died their source of income and safety, the one who represents them in the world. Her brother is dead. She’s hurting and so there’s an accusation that goes along with the lament, *“If only you had been here.”* But you weren’t here. Lazarus did die. And now it all appears so hopeless. Rabbinic tradition says that for the first three days you are only mostly dead. There is a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Lazarus was all dead. There wasn’t even a spark of life left. After three

days there is no hope. He's all dead. Martha's has faith but there is more for her to learn. She doesn't understand what is going on. She has some of the truth but not all of the truth.

Jesus comforts her with, "*Your brother will rise again,*" Jesus seems to be speaking on two levels and Martha is only hearing him on one. The Greek doesn't have "again." It simply states, "Your brother will rise." *I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.* Jesus has to explain, "*I am the resurrection and the life. One who believes in me, even if he dies, will never die.* Jesus doesn't say, "Whoever is perfectly obedient to me, who has life together, who never doubts. But the one who has faith, and that faith being a gift of God will never die. But did you die? No, before you stands the God of the living and although Lazarus did die he did not die eternally.

Many have been there, a close family member critically ill, text messages are flying out to family, and the prayers don't seem to be helping. It would be a lie if we didn't expect Jesus or God to come and help in any way, to restore the world and our problems. He's close. He's promised, "Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." We not only have the promise we have his command, "*Call on me in a day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will honor me.*" We know he is here. But then prayers seem like a long time in being answered. Sometimes the answer never comes and what we want doesn't happen. At these times our beliefs are challenged. We may say, think, do, one thing but then believe another.

We may even look like Mary and Martha living as if there is no hope when the one who is life stands before us. (I'm not saying don't weep. It's a good thing not to bottle that up deep down inside but don't weep like those who have no hope.) And we have hope but we don't always live like it. We often live like we're the most important people on the earth, essential to life, that God will always answer our prayers as we see fit, that we won't suffer. But when he doesn't our thoughts and words say, "God doesn't care! It isn't fair. Where were you? You weren't here."

But... did you die? God wants us to understand that he is in control even if we die. And yet we'll look at God like he's the uncaring, absent minded God, who can't be bothered with our day to day problems. And then he reminds us, "But, did you die?" If you did, you do know that God is still in control of life and death. You and I are not god. While we like to pretend we are in control. We need God's help. We weren't mostly dead, we were all dead, like that valley of dry bones when God did something about it. But that doesn't look like a big miracle. Deliverance from death, that's a big miracle. That's what we want. And that's what we have. Verse 38 however has been abused to say, "If you only have enough faith, you will see the glory of God." If that faith is God's gift to you, the miracle that he has worked in your heart, how could it be anything but sufficient?

The glory of God is evident even in death. In the midst of life we are in death. We want to see glory. And we see the glory of God in the Gospel of John at the crucifixion of Jesus. Another moment when Jesus is deeply moved is found in the Garden of Gethsemane and there he prays, "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you*" (John 17:1).

The glory of God would be revealed at the cross as God goes about doing what he does best; saving sinners, bringing the dead to life. God became man to make that happen. Jesus fully man is able to sympathize with sinners. He doesn't just shrug off our struggles with, "But, did you die?" He took our death and died in our place. Jesus is also fully God and so that means he has the power to do something about death. He can save.

Throughout our lesson he looks ticked off. He's deeply moved and troubled (which literally means to snort with anger like a horse). Jesus is upset but with who or what? It's not Mary or Martha. I'm not certain it's with the Judeans who came to comfort, although they ridicule him, "*couldn't he who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?*" Jesus is upset with the destruction done to his perfect creation. He's upset with death itself. It wasn't meant to be this way. *Where have they laid him?* He begins barking orders. He's about to spring into action and go to war. He's about to conquer death and take away the stone even if he stinketh (according to the KJV). Jesus isn't interested in respect for the dead. He's there to open the jaws of death and bring back life.

Jesus is pushing for faith and he uses the very Word of God as a call to trust in him. *“Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the crowd standing here. So that they may believe you sent me.”* Many believe but some would rather kill him. There are only two reactions, love him or hate him. And here the Judeans are more concerned with their position and place than they are with the truth. And this sickness leads to death.

Lazarus didn't die eternally. He didn't experience hell and what we all deserve. That would come later as Jesus would die for the nation. That would come during Holy Week and Good Friday when Jesus died for the sins of the world. He handed himself over into the hands of evil men. He gave his life over for ours. He is the resurrection and the life. That's not an event a far off distant future. It's a person. It's Jesus. Jesus is life. All those who believe have life now.

Do you believe this? Jesus has brought you to life, from dead dry bones to active living being. In baptism we too have a Lazarus-like resurrection, having passed through death into life with our Lord. In baptism we are assured of the forgiveness of sins. In baptism we are assured of God's blessing in this life and in the life to come. And so, when the inevitable adversities of life come our way, we turn to him who not only has the desire, but also the power and ability to help us in our time of need—the one who is true to his word and faithful to his promises.

Jesus is here even in death and he has done something about death. Jesus suffered and died for you. You've already died with Jesus. And one day when you die and a box is lowered into the ground he will call you forth from the ground and death will give up. He will wake us from our sleep. Our bodies will be glorified. We will rise, no pain, no sickness, and no more painful goodbyes. You will see him face to face and no sin will accuse you before God.

Lazarus would live to die another day. Don't know when or how he died a second time. But I imagine he was fairly bold when it came to proclaiming what God had done. How could you silence him? Jesus brought him back from the dead, he could do it again. So it is with us. He's raised us once. He'll do it again. No matter what happens in this world, if we live or die, if we get sick or stay healthy,

But, did you die? It may sound callous coming from friends or family as they mock you for complaining about the lack of toilet paper or canned goods. We'll get through this. We won't die, but we will live and proclaim what the Lord has done. Maybe we'll die physically but even then, that's not the end when we know the guy who holds the power over life and death. He died – so that we might live. He lives so that we might live eternally. Amen.