

The Resurrection and the Life
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John 11:1-45

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of 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; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' ⁸The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' ⁹Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' ¹¹After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' ¹²The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' ²³Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When 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.' ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' ³⁷But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet

bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

If we are not careful, this reading might be used to define the strength of our own faith, our own belief. We might reason that Mary and Martha must be some kind of super-believers that Christ would give them that for which they yearned. What is wrong with us that our greatest desires are not fulfilled? Our loved ones are not healed? Our jobs are not secured? Our nation does not stay out of war? What are we doing wrong that Martha and Mary were doing right?

That, however, is not what this reading, or any other from John, is about. This reading is not a commentary on the qualifications or strengths (or weaknesses for that matter) of those around Jesus. John wrote over and over about the ways in which it was evident that Jesus was God, in ways which centered on the works, the signs, the teachings of Jesus all giving glory to God. Last week in our reading about the man blind from birth and this week, Jesus says outright that what he will do in these situations will give glory to God. When asked by whose fault was the man born blind, Jesus replied, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” This week, as Jesus responds to news of Lazarus’ deadly illness, Jesus says, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” As far as John is concerned, these events are about Jesus and God, not about us.

So, when you read that Jesus asked people if they believed in him, recognize that belief was never a prerequisite or tied in any way to Jesus’ choice to perform the signs he performed. Each act was done in order to give glory to God, in this case through the extraordinary acts only attributable to God; in other cases through the ideal obedience of Christ to God’s will...which brings up another sticky point. The blind man received sight and Mary and Martha received their living brother Lazarus because Jesus chose to perform signs which, in turn, gave them what they desired. Why did Jesus give them what they wanted? Again, in a different way, we ask why our greatest desires are not fulfilled. If not because of our insufficient belief, why else would Jesus choose to intervene for some and not others? We touched on this at Bible study this week. To them and to you, the assurance I can give through my small human understanding of God is this: God is always making good but nowhere are we promised that good happens in our timeframe or in direct response to our personal bad.

That stinks, I know. We want to witness **our** bad turn good, **our** misfortunes righted, **our** illnesses and those of our loved ones healed. I think, though, that makes God very small and God’s creation very small. What does working for good in God’s view of the world look like, how does it all fit together? I can’t say I know but I am convinced it is much bigger than my imagining. In the past

couple of weeks, I discovered podcasts, recordings of a variety of things which I can download and listen to whenever I want, no matter when they originally aired. I came to podcasts because someone recommended two to me, thinking I might enjoy them on my drive in. I found one in particular¹ to be extremely enjoyable, something that, until two weeks ago, I didn't even know existed and now I consider myself a huge fan and about which I will gladly wax poetic to anyone willing to listen, and even those unwilling, in hopes that I might share this enjoyable experience with others. Somehow, for some reason, in my listening, I suddenly realized that there are hundreds, thousands, of podcasts out there, most of which I'll never know about, many of which wouldn't interest me one bit but for which they each have loyal followers, other people who would wax poetic to any listener about this specific broadcast which they enjoy. Somehow in that, I grasped, well, how little I grasped. My worldview is very small. My interests are limited. If I overlap in some interests with others, there are thousands more which I do not share. The internet and all which can be found on it helps me realize a fraction of what is out there about which I know nothing. I know even less about the whole of creation and could not, would not dare to claim a handle on creation and its tremendous, interwoven connectivity. I would never think to say I saw the big picture for it is greater than my eye can see and my mind can understand.

This reading, like others from John, is intended to capture in bite-sized portions the good God can do. By their format, they are condensed into a book so we read of many examples happening in a short period of time to very specific people. We **do** understand how great and loving our God can be because of what happened in these specific interactions. What we don't understand about God is still great, though. Things that were explained to the woman at the well about living water and to Martha about the resurrection and the life remain merely metaphors that people like me standing in places like this have tried for centuries to make clearer, taking the metaphors and trying to translate them, if you will, into something more tangible, something we can grasp. We wish for a way to touch the living water, to drink it and feel alive so that believing might be easier. We wish for an example of eternal life to stand before us so we can say, "Ah, I see!"

Alas, as Paul wrote, for now we see dimly as in a mirror; eventually we will see face-to-face. And we walk by faith until then. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Everyone who lives in me will never die. Everyone who believes in me will never die. To live in Christ, we do our best to love as Christ loved. To believe in Christ, we do our best to trust that God is working for good, especially when we seek our

¹ Thrilling Adventure Hour: Beyond Belief

personal good. To live in Christ, we hope and pray for good but we do not lose faith when what we expect, what we desire to see does not happen. To believe in Christ, we trust that eternal life with God, life as we are assured in Revelation will include no more sorrow or pain, through the promises of Christ is a gift given by God, regardless of what we experience in this life, regardless of what we endure. Every time we gather around this communion table, we proclaim the saving death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The **saving** death. In this act, we profess our belief in Christ, we proclaim our belief that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, whose death was not in vain but for the sake of salvation, our salvation. Those who believe in Christ, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in Christ will never die. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Lord, grant that we might have faith each day. Amen.