

"Do You Believe This?"

John 10:40-11:27

Deacon Chair, Jason Justinger

Most of us are familiar with the story of Lazarus, and we will get into the real action next week, but initially here John is setting the stage. First we're introduced to Mary, Martha and Lazarus. If you've read the Gospel of Luke in chapter 10, you may remember that Mary was the woman sitting at the feet of Jesus while Martha was distracted with all of the dinner preparations. So Martha is the Woman of Action tending to the things that need doing, while Mary is the Woman of Compassion tending to the needs of her own heart. But here in John 11, the two women appear to reverse roles. This time, it's Martha who goes to Jesus while Mary stays behind at home with all the guests. Mary stays home away from Jesus here, but it's interesting to note that John introduces Mary as the one who "... *anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair*".

It's interesting to me because John hasn't told us that story yet. The story of Mary and the anointing is told in all four of the gospels, but here in John, it comes a bit later. Chapter 12 to be specific. Regardless, I find this stuff truly fascinating. We get to meet Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha. We learn that he is sick. We also learn that he is someone the Lord loves. Yes, I know Jesus loves everyone, but there was a friendship here. Jesus cared deeply for this family. There was a relationship. And yet "*when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*"

So Jesus waited a few more days, knowing that his friend would die, knowing the grief and people involved, and knowing... knowing what he would have to do. But we will come back to this. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. One last point on this, it should be noted that in Luke 10 "*Martha opened her house to them,*" and here John says "*the village of Mary and her sister Martha.*" Martha's house, but Mary's village. And it's that village we should talk about next. Bethany. It's a small rest stop about two miles from Jerusalem according to verse 18. The timing here is important as well. Jesus had ended his wrangling with the rabbi's and priests and, in the rest of John's gospel, he will focus on his disciples. So time is short. Passover is right around the corner.

After delaying for two whole days, Jesus suddenly says to his disciples, "*Let's go to Judea again.*" You can almost envision the faces staring back at him. "*The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you and you want to go back?'*" And Jesus' reply is fascinating to me. "*Are there not twelve hours in the day?'*" Twelve hours in the day. This is one of those verses that just jumps out at me. There has to be something more to it. We know that the Jewish day starts at sunset, and that the days are shorter in winter. So where is Jesus going with this? What does he have in mind?

Well, he continues: "*If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.*" I know that Jesus is usually quoting Old Testament Scripture when he speaks, especially in this way. And my study Bible has this handy cross reference section in the middle. Sure enough... Isaiah 9:2. "*The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a great light has shined.*" Great...Light. That's Messiah type language. This is the prophecy we read every Christmas Eve about the birth of Jesus. So in this case, I think MacArthur has it right.

His note reads "During the light of the sun, most people did their work safely. When darkness came, they stopped. The proverbial saying, however, had a deeper meaning. As long as the Son performed His Father's will ... He was safe. Jesus was stressing that as long as he was on earth, doing God's will, even at this late time in his ministry, He would safely complete God's purposes." End quote. So this is one of those "ye of little faith" moments. If the storm couldn't sink the boat, why were the disciples so afraid?

Which brings us to our old friend, Doubting Thomas. Here in John, he's called, "Didymos" or "The Twin," but there is no doubt in his words here... "*Let us also go, that we may die with Him.*" Man. It's powerful. It's a call to action not just to the Twelve, but to all of Christ's disciples to follow Jesus. To die with him. It's a call to follow a brother into the breach. Into danger. Thomas wanted to be with Jesus even in the face of discomfort, peril and danger. And we should want the same for our brothers and sisters, for each other.

Martha demonstrates a similar sort of courage for us in verse 20. "*So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out and met him.*" Matthew Henry read this story and said, "When God, by his grace and providence, is coming towards us in ways of mercy and comfort, we should, like Martha, go forth by faith, hope, and prayer, to meet him." And what did Martha say when she got to the Lord? "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" This verse perplexed me. Is she rebuking the Lord? Or is this simply a testimony, an acknowledgment of faith in him?

I was able to find commentators who fell on both sides. One thing they all agreed upon was that she was grieving. She was hurt at this tragic loss. And rightfully so! We have lost many ourselves over the past year and can relate. And only Jesus manages to cut through the grief. He answers her: *"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."* These two verses are in the running and on the short list for "on my grave stone."

This is the culmination of an idea, a glimmer of a thought that Job barely dared to think, when his heart was broken more than a thousand years before Christ. After burying all his children, Job said to God: *"If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! If someone dies, can he live again?"* I believe this is why most of us are here this morning. It's the great hope of our faith. And we know of three instances where Jesus raises the dead. We see the little girl in Luke 7 and widow's son in Nain, a middle aged man, in Luke 9.

And we're about to see Him raise Lazarus here. There are a number of instances in Scripture where people are brought back from the dead, but this is much more... impressive. Why? Well, we've already said that Jesus waited two whole days before coming for Lazarus. It's easy to think that this delay caused or led to Lazarus' death. More likely, I feel, was that Lazarus was already dead by the time the messenger arrived. This delay ensured that Lazarus was not only merely dead, but he was really most sincerely dead.

You see, both the widow's son and Jarius' daughter in the Gospel of Luke had only recently died when Jesus raised them. These miracles could have been written off as if they hadn't died at all. But here we have Lazarus, John tells us, four days in the tomb. There can be no question Lazarus was dead. And why did Lazarus have to die? Lazarus died, Jesus tells us, *"...for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."* And he'll go on to say, in verse 14, that; *"Lazarus has died, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there that you may believe."* So the raising of Lazarus was for the benefit of the disciples.

It was a preview of his resurrection to come. Planting the seed that Jesus had defeated death before. Bringing many to believe in Christ and strengthening the faith of those who already believed. Like Job so many years before her, Martha confessed with a broken heart: *"Yes Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."* Well, let's just compare her words to the purpose for which John wrote this book. The apostle tells us himself in Chapter 20, verse 31. *"...these signs are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* So the only question left for us to answer is: *"Do you believe this?"*

Mid-Week Devotional

The Seven Signs and Seven "I Am" Statements of Jesus

"I am the resurrection and the life.

*Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live,
and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*

Do you believe this?"

John 11:25,26

Deacon Chair, Jason Justinger

The raising of Lazarus is the seventh and final miracle recorded here in the Gospel of John. First, we saw Jesus turning water into wine in Cana (2:1-11). Second, we saw him heal an official's son in Capernaum (4:46-54). Third, he healed an invalid at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (5:1-18). Fourth, he fed the five thousand near the Sea of Galilee (6:5-14). Fifth, he walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee (6:16-21). Sixth, he healed a blind man in Jerusalem (9:1-7). And now, last and seventh, Lazarus will walk from the tomb.

I know we've heard Pastor saying this before, but 7 is the number of completeness for these folks. There's nothing mystical or magical here, the number 7 had just come to mean complete to them. Like our saying the whole nine yards. Everything. Perfection. Completeness. And John likes his completeness.

So the words above that Jesus spoke to us on Sunday are the fifth of seven "I Am" statements that Jesus will make to us in John's Gospel. So far, Christ has taught us that he is "The Bread of Life" in chapter 6; "The Light of the World" in chapter 8; "The Door of the Sheep" and "The Good Shepherd" both from Chapter 10. And now we learn that he is "The Resurrection and the Life". Interesting that he's both the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus is both the destination and the journey. Again, something we'll come back to before we're done with John's gospel.