

## **John 11:1-45**

### **The Raising of Lazarus**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead has always frustrated me. Why did Jesus not just do the easy thing of coming quickly and healing Lazarus? Easy for him, that is.

Why delay? Why let his friends go through the grief of a loved one dying? Why let them go through the whole process of sorting out a funeral and burying the friend and brother?

Even in the midst of this confusion, Martha declares a level of faith in Jesus when she says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She knows Jesus can heal. She knows Jesus would have made a difference.

It's a question that I'm sure many of you are pondering at this time. Why has God seemingly let the world fall to pieces. Our lives have changed drastically in the past few weeks, and I'm sure you can empathise with how Martha felt when Jesus didn't come straight away to fix things, to heal Lazarus.

Maybe we too would ask a similar question of Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, our community would still be able to worship together."

Maybe your reaction has been a bit stronger. It feels like our world is crashing down around us. Death and the prospect of death surrounds us. We have people constantly wailing and moaning in our ears. At least that's how it feels depending on how much of the news you watch these days. And it can bring despair, and we can wonder where Jesus is. "Lord, if you would be here among us, none of this would be happening..."

But Jesus is here among us. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, and he comes to his creation to bring new life. When Jesus did come to see Mary and Martha, he wept. Jesus is heartbroken over the death of a dearly loved friend. He is not just distant and far off, leaving us to our own devices. He is indeed God, come near to us.

As He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Even when everything about Lazarus' death makes it impossible for his sisters and the gathered friends to imagine he could walk out of the tomb, when Jesus calls to him, he comes.

And even in the midst of death, our Lord comes to us, opens up our graves, and calls us to come forth to him. Like Lazarus, he weeps over us, yet he raises us up from the dead. He frees us from bondage of sin and death. The Lord opens our graves, and the Spirit gives life even to dry bones.

It is no accident today that the raising of Lazarus is paired with the reading from Ezekiel. Jesus' relationship to death is mirrored in Ezekiel's story. Both narratives reveal God's power. When Ezekiel pronounces the word of the Lord in obedience to God's command to prophesy, the bones rattle. When Jesus cries, "Lazarus, come out!" the dead man rises.

The word of the Lord is the force that brings life out of death, in both the stories of the bones and of Lazarus. The Lord speaks and it comes to be. The universe and all that lives came into existence by the power of God's word. Both the dry bones and Lazarus, the man who has been dead for three days, hear and respond to the word of the Lord.

When Jesus speaks to Lazarus, neither he nor anyone else present is said to believe in Jesus' power. In fact, the opposite is the case. The gathered crowd does not expect the dead man to emerge when the stone is rolled away. The people there assume that death is final, there is no remedy for it.

And yet, this encounter with Jesus shows us that the crowd did not have to believe in order to make Lazarus' appearance possible. It is Jesus who is the resurrection and the life that simply speaks life back into Lazarus. In doing so, Jesus creates the ability to believe by causing death to turn to life. And the word of Jesus, this life-giving, death-defeating word of Jesus brings forth a confession of faith. Martha says, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." Mary, when hearing of all this comes and kneels before Jesus. This is an act of worship. The response to the arrival of the one who is the resurrection and the life is one of faith, of belief, of worship, and of much rejoicing and thanksgiving.

In these strange days, where we cannot gather as church to hear the life-giving word of Jesus proclaimed to us, I pray that you still find ways to receive his gifts. May his word, through whatever means you have to read it, to hear, to have it proclaimed to you, may it give you life. May you, like Mary and Martha, continue to respond in faith and belief and worship and rejoicing and thanksgiving. And may God continue to give you hope in the victory of Christ over death. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.