

Gospel of John #18

Lazarus

John 11a:1-45

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I have been enjoying this sermon series on the Gospel of John! I am learning new things even though I've studied this book before, especially the layers of belief that God is calling me into. So far, we've heard a story taking place over 3 years. Today, the breaks turn on as Jesus heads toward the cross.

Notice the "SEVENS"

7 signs (miracles Jesus performed, the things that show He is the Messiah.) **Isa 35** says that God will come and you will know because the blind can see, the crippled can walk, and the deaf can hear. The people were looking for these signs to identify the Messiah.

- The wedding: Jesus turns the water into wine
- Jesus heals the official's son from far away
- Jesus heals the paralyzed man
- Jesus feed the 5,000
- Jesus walks on water
- Jesus heals the blind man
- Today's miracle of Lazarus

7 "I am's" which are descriptions of his identity, things which people also looked for to identify the Messiah

- The bread of life
- Light of the world
- The gate
- The good shepherd
- Three more to come, including one today!

Look for these main points as we read along in this story:

If you believe, you will see the glory of God
Jesus meets us where we are

Jesus is up to something big

The story: Jesus is good friends with Mary, Martha and Lazarus who live in Bethany. They have love and camaraderie: they have hung out together. When Lazarus becomes really sick, the sisters send word to Jesus that *the one you love* is sick. This is also how we can identify ourselves!

John 11

1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2** (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) **3** So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

Jesus knows what no one else knows. He is already talking to the Father about this. Jesus is up to something bigger than Lazarus’s situation.

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6** So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,

Staying two more days seems like an odd way to show his love! Jesus stays where he is until he knows Lazarus has died.

7 and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

The disciples are puzzled! This was an area where people had tried to kill Jesus.

He tells them a parable:

9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. **10** It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

A parable is a story about the physical world to explain the spiritual world. Jesus is saying they won’t stumble in this situation. John has been talking about the “hour that hasn’t come.” For this reason, there is no need to be afraid.

11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” **13** Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, **15** and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Jesus has to explain that he is dead. His disciples believe him but they don't totally know what they believe.

16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Another evidence that they really don't know what they believe.

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Martha is a woman of action! She has questions for Jesus.

18 Now Bethany was less than two miles^[b] from Jerusalem, **19** and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. **20** When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. **22** But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

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

24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus meets us where we are at. Martha is busy and grieving but when she meets Jesus, she has a theological conversation with him. Martha is affirming a Jewish belief here; however, she doesn't totally get what she believes.

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; **26** and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

This is a beautiful moment: Jesus tells her he is the Messiah. She believes but doesn't understand what she believes. Shiva is a tradition of sitting with the relatives of people who died. People are doing this with Mary and Martha. When Mary jumps up to follow Martha, many people follow.

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." **29** When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. **30** Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. **31** When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Mary is a woman of emotion. Notice that she says the same thing as Martha but this time, it's very emotional. Jesus meets Mary in her emotion, which makes Jesus feel angry and he weeps with her. He is angry because he is confronting death. He sees the grieving and weeping, he sees death at his opponent with all the destruction that it has wrought since the beginning. He is preparing for the final fight at the cross and He throws down the gauntlet with Lazarus: "No death, you are done."

Jesus meets us where we are as well: there is no shame in having emotions or trying to figure things out or even in being dead (like Lazarus), he will meet you where you are.

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. **34** "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. **39** "Take away the stone," he said.

Tombs were dug out of the side of the hill; he wanted the stone rolled away. This makes the people shocked at his unusual request.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

Lazarus is VERY dead; up until now, we have seen people brought back to life but it is immediately after they died. No one is expecting Lazarus to be “un” dead. But the people do what he asks anyway.

40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

Believe you will see the glory of God. This is the message of the passage to us as well as to Mary. I think we need to understand “glory” which we use often but don’t really understand. Glory can mean the brightness of something. In this context, though, it means that what is good inside of you is being revealed. Each of us has something good inside that might be revealed at any point. God is ALL glorious: he is only LOVE, all creative, all good. Whenever God is revealed, glory is revealed.

Consider a present-day example: Caitlin Clark is a fantastic basketball player who was really good at basketball on a national stage. She can shoot 3-pointers from all over the court: her glory is revealed when she does this. The cool thing is that she is happy to share her glory when she passes the ball to a teammate and they are successful. She was drafted this week to the Indiana professional team: she has been further glorified. She can in turn call out others and glorify them: “My dad, my coach sacrificed so much to help me.”

Going back to Jesus, this helps us understand the concept of Glory. With Jesus and the Father, glory is happening all the time. He is teaching and loving the people around him well and people are starting to see this. But with glory, if you don’t believe you can’t see it. Some people might think he is a trickster who is up to something bad. But Jesus is always looking to the Father and glorifying the Father. Later, the Father will glorify Jesus in an ironic way: this event will lead Jesus to the cross.

In **John 3**, Jesus says “**14** Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,^[9] **15** that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

The glory of Jesus is always connected to the cross. It looks shameful unless you believe and see that Jesus has come to sacrifice for us and save us from our sin. His glory is revealed on the cross. Jesus is buried, Jesus is resurrected: Lazarus is a foreshadow of this. If you believe, you will see His glory.

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. **42** I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

Jesus calls Lazarus out but it is by the power of the Father.

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

Lazarus was probably hopping because he was wrapped in linen.

44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

No one does anything because they are so shocked!

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Some of these people told everyone else what happened. This healing of Lazarus leads Jesus to the cross: **he heals him at the expense of his own life.**

Let’s go back to **John 1:1**: In the beginning (**Gen 1:1**), Jesus was with God. Jesus was there when creation happened and people were formed out of the dust. Jesus has been walking through history to bring salvation from the consequences of their sin.

He is up to something BIG. **Isa 35** captures this beautifully! We can also be aware of this in our own stories: He is up to something big in your life, in your week, and it’s easy to lose sight of this.

I realized this week that I have a place of loss and grief for the people who have left the Village over the past 23 years. People are here in community and experience grief and joy and pray and worship together and when that person or family leaves, it’s confusing and it hurts, even if the reason they leave is to move away and go to school, for example. In this place, as I come to John 11, I hear Jesus asking me to follow the examples of Mary and Martha:

- **Tell him what’s on my heart.** (“My friends have left.”) My tendency is that when families leave, I turn inward on myself and try to control my calendar and words...I try to figure things out. But Jesus says to tell him what’s on my heart and to...
- **Wait expectantly.** This requires
- **Listen to Jesus.** He will meet us where we’re at.
- **Believe he is up to something bigger!** I need to believe that Jesus is up to something big *here and now.*

If you pause to think about a loss or grief or confusion that you are holding, Jesus is inviting you to bring it to him, name it, and watch for opportunities to interact with Jesus, listen to him, and if

he tells him to do something you don't understand, do it, (ie: roll the stone away), if you believe, you will see the GLORY of GOD.

Let's pause and take the things that cause grief and confusion, choose one. Let's take a silent moment to offer this to Jesus.

"Jesus, here is what happened (or didn't happen)," or ask him a question. Offer this to him now. I invite you to watch this week to see what He does.