

November 10, 2024

John 11:17-45

This didn't need to happen. Jesus had plenty of time to get to Bethany. His dear friends, Mary and Martha had sent word to him that Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, was sick and close to death. Jesus easily could have gotten there right away. He could have healed him. This didn't need to happen. But it did. Jesus purposely, knowingly didn't come until it was too late- Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. There was no hope. Only grief, only tears, only loss. Why? Why would he let this happen? That's the question burning on the minds of his disciples, all the people that had come to mourn, and Lazarus' sisters. Why didn't he come? This didn't need to happen- why did he let it happen? As it turns out, Jesus has a purpose for everything he does. Jesus wants Mary, Martha, you and me not to simply *hope* for new life, new joy, a new world, the resurrection, but **Expect Resurrection. And that means, 1. Hear his truth, 2. See his tears, and 3. Expect his Action.**

1. Hear His Truth. Martha hears Jesus is coming, and runs out and meets him before he even gets to the village and blurts out: "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died." Well, she's not wrong! What does she mean by this? Is she angry? Is she frustrated? Is she sad? Is she confused? Yes. But she's certainly hopeful, she still believes in Jesus when she says, "I know even now God will give you whatever you ask." She still believes that Jesus is powerful- but I'm not sure she quite gets it. Jesus tells her that Lazarus is going to rise, and she says probably the same thing you'd say if someone came up to you at your brother's funeral and said that he's going to rise: "Yes. I know. I know that he's going to rise on the last day like everyone else. I know." And here, Jesus seems to raise his voice and say, "Don't you understand? *I am the Resurrection and the life.* I don't simply derive my power from God above, I don't simply tell people about how they'll rise from the dead. I'm not here just to be a teacher, or a voice of God- I am God, and I have the power right now, this day, to raise people from the dead, and those who believe in me don't ever really die. Do you believe that? Why would Jesus ask that? Because Martha, although she's a Christian, is struggling with her faith. She's struggling to accept the fact that Jesus has let this happen, and the doubt is beginning to creep in that perhaps Jesus didn't do it because God didn't let him, because in her mind perhaps Jesus and God the Father aren't exactly equal and maybe Jesus has to take his orders from him. Why would she believe that? Because it's easier to believe that than the idea that Jesus could and can easily in his own power save Lazarus and chose not to do it. We do this too. We think, well, if Jesus could, he would! If he could actually do the things he can claim to do, then he would do them right now in the way that I want him to do them! We see this with people who reject God's existence altogether- if God is truly all powerful and all good, then he wouldn't allow evil- and we see it on the small scale in Christians when bad things happen and people die and they have to swallow the fact that Jesus absolutely could have done something, but chose to let it happen. It didn't have to happen! But Jesus let it. And in those moments, Martha and all of us need to hear Jesus' truth. He is the resurrection and the life, and he is so powerful that those who believe in him,

who are connected to him, never really die, which means that as our loved ones lie dead, we have to be patient. We have to wait for the day that Jesus will raise everyone from the dead, and that his time is the best time, not ours. Martha, do you believe this? St. John's, do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus is the true God come into the world and has the power to raise whomever he wants from the dead? If you do, then you can also trust him to know when the right time is to restore your loved ones back to you. Well, that means we don't have to be sad, right? Well, look at Jesus.

2. See His Tears. Did you notice something fascinating in this text? Martha comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother would not have died," and Jesus gives her the truth that she needs. Mary comes and says the exact same thing- and Jesus is speechless. Mary is grief stricken, not simply crying, but wailing along with many people who were there- this was a sad funeral- an untimely death of a man who shouldn't have died yet. And Jesus sees how much pain and grief this has caused people he loves, and he's, well, "disturbed in Spirit" isn't a great translation. Literally, this could be translated, "Jesus snorted"- like a horse snorts with anger before he goes into battle. Jesus isn't just sad or disturbed, he's enraged. He's violently angry. The deepest depths of his soul are filled with wrath to the point where he can hardly speak, only, "Where is he?" And Jesus weeps. No sermon. No preaching. No miracles (yet). Just tears. Why? Didn't Jesus know that he was going to raise Lazarus on the final day? Didn't Jesus know that he was about to raise him right then and there? Yes! He absolutely did. But yet he's angry and sad? Why? Because he loves Lazarus and is sad that he died. Because he loves Mary and Martha and everyone there and he's sad that they're sad. But more than that- he's violently angry. Because Jesus didn't create this world with death in it, and he didn't create people to die. And he loves each and every person so much that when they have to say goodbye to their loved ones, something Jesus did not create them to do, he's angry that something so painful has been brought on his people. My friends, you need Jesus' truth during the times when you lose your loved ones to death. You need his truth, but you also desperately need his tears. You need to know that when you feel the hurt and pain of lowering someone into the ground, Jesus feels that hurt and pain as well. Jesus isn't just some God "up there" who just looks on our lowly human existence with indifference. He's deeply emotionally invested. He cares, and he's violently angry when he sees how much pain death causes us. He didn't create us for that. But here's the thing- "If he loved him so, and he was powerful enough to heal a blind man, couldn't he have saved Lazarus?" That's a great question! If Jesus is so powerful, the resurrection and the life, and if Jesus is really as loving and empathetic as he seems to be, and he really is so loving and so sad and so angry over death, why doesn't he do something about it? The answer: *He did.*

3. Expect His Action. I hope by now you realize that Jesus' power and his empathy alone don't actually do much for you. Jesus is powerful? Great! Who cares? Jesus is nice? Jesus cries at my side with me? Great! God is near the broken-hearted? Great! Who cares? What good is all this talk of truth and tears if Jesus doesn't actually do anything with his power and empathetic

feelings? He does- but watch carefully- everything he does he does with purpose. He says, “remove the stone,” which Martha responds- literally- “He stinks!” He’s been rotting for four days! Jesus has to remind her, again, “Didn’t I tell you if you trust me, you will see the glory of God? Trust me, Martha! Stop underestimating me!” They move it, and Jesus first, before he does anything, prays aloud to the Father. Why? Well it’s not because he doesn’t think the Father doesn’t hear him- but because everyone needs to know exactly who Jesus is and what he is going to do. Jesus is going to give them a taste of what is to come. Do you understand that? When we think of Jesus doing miracles, we typically think he’s suspending the natural order to do something supernatural- a man is blind, and Jesus suspends the natural order to do something unnatural. Jesus interferes with the way things normally are to do something abnormal- heals a sick person. But that’s not true. Death isn’t normal. Death isn’t natural. Death wasn’t a part of God’s perfect creation, it was thrust upon us by our sin and now Jesus is here to restore humanity to what once was, one dead person at a time. And here’s the proof that he can absolutely do it: “Lazarus! Come out.” And the dead man walks out, alive- and those who see finally, finally trust him and now know exactly what to expect in the days to come. But not everyone. When people heard about this, the religious leaders decided that enough was enough, and Jesus needed to be executed. But little did they know that this was the whole plan. Sure, Jesus had the power to raise people from the dead, he had the tears to prove his love, but tears wouldn’t save us, nor would his power. Because although Lazarus woke up, he would die again. The wages of sin is death. The problem isn’t that Jesus isn’t able to raise the dead, but that the dead are dead because they deserve to die. If we are to escape from death, someone must die in our place. And he did. The all-powerful God of Heaven and Earth died- which seems odd to say- how can he who is God die? He did. And through his death, he saved from death so that those who trust him shall live, even though they die- no Christian is ever truly dead- just asleep. And every single person you’ve had to say goodbye to who knows Jesus is not truly gone. They live with him- overjoyed and perfect and the day is coming- very soon- when just like Lazarus they will hear Jesus’ voice, and you along with them, shall finally be made fully immortal forever.

Therefore, friends, live like you’ll live forever. Our dear sister, Marjorie Rolloff, was taken to heaven a few months ago and now dances for joy in God’s presence with all the countless people who have been rescued from death just like her. On that day I visited her for the last time, we prayed with her, we read Scripture and we encouraged her with what she already knew- Jesus was her perfect Savior and because of what he did for her, she could die with joy. And she did. And on that day, one of her great-grandchildren said something so simple, and yet so, so profound: “This is a good and bad day.” That’s so true! Just because we know she’ll rise doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be sad. Death is sad! If Jesus cried at the death of his loved ones, who are we to not do that? Mourning is natural and okay for Christians. But we don’t despair, we don’t make up little myths about our loved ones about how they are still here with us or looking down on us! They’re alive with Christ, celebrating with the King of the Universe with all the saints that have gone before them and they live forever. So will you. That means you don’t need to fear death.

You don't need to despair and panic when sickness and danger show up. You don't need to panic when this world seems to fall apart- which it will. You can face the scariest, most inescapable thing there is with joy, courage, and confidence. Live like you'll live forever. Hope and be joyful like you're going to live forever. Don't just hope or wish for new life, new joy, for everything that's had to become untrue. *Expect it.* Amen.