

John 11:1-46
I Am The Resurrection And The Life

I want to look today at a passage from John 11. We've been working our way through what we call the "I AM" sayings in John's Gospel in our all-age services, but this one doesn't lend itself very well to an all-age service. So, we're going to look at it today instead. Let's read from John 11, beginning at verse 1.

[Read John 11:1-46]

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

⁴When he heard this, Jesus said, 'This illness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.' ⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷and 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?'

⁹Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk in the day-time will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰It is when people walk at night that they stumble, for they have no light.'

¹¹After 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.'

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

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

¹⁶Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

¹⁷On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to

comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰When 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. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'

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

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

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

²⁷'Yes, Lord,' she told him, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.'

²⁸After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. 'The Teacher is here,' she said, 'and is asking for you.' ²⁹When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When 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.

³²When 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.'

³³When 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.

³⁵Jesus wept.

³⁶Then 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?'

³⁸Jesus, 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.

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

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

41So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42I 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.'

43When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth round his face.

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

45Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. 46But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

[Pray]

1) The Staging of the Drama

As a drama graduate, I enjoy the great theatre in this scene. If it was in East Enders, it would probably bridge two episodes, perhaps breaking at Thomas' bold suggestion: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (would they all die there?). Or perhaps breaking at Jesus' authoritative call, "Lazarus, come out!" ... **[sing theme tune]**

Uniquely among Jesus' miracles, there is an element of staging about this drama. Despite his love for the family, when he heard of Lazarus' serious condition, Jesus stayed where he was two more days until Lazarus actually died (vv.6,14). It took him *four* days to get there (v.17), so he wouldn't have arrived in time anyway. But why the delay? It seems it was designed to emphasise Jesus' miraculous power. By the fourth day, the body would have begun to decompose – hence the smell (v.39)! But there is also later evidence of a Jewish belief, for which there is no biblical basis, that a person's *spirit* hung around for three days after death before finally departing. If this belief existed in Jesus' day, perhaps he ensured a four day gap after Lazarus' death so that no-one could have *any* doubt that he was truly dead and truly raised back to life.

The other slightly staged aspect of this miracle is that, unusually, Jesus prayed *aloud* before he performed it, so that the crowds might believe that God had truly sent him when the miracle happened.

2) The Slowness of the Disciples

Secondly, we see the slowness of the disciples to understand what Jesus was saying and doing (vv.7-14). They were scared about him returning to Judea because his life had been threatened there; whereas *Jesus* knew that he would not be killed before his Father's timing, and further, that his death was God's *plan* to restore us to himself. Then they didn't grasp that Lazarus was not asleep, but dead. And Thomas' response, "Let's go and die with him," shows a continued lack of understanding about Jesus' death. I find their slowness encouraging, seeing Jesus' patience with them – it says it's ok to fail and get it wrong in following Jesus!

3) The Sensitivity of Jesus

Thirdly, it's worth noting the sensitivity of Jesus to Martha and Mary. The Gospels' portrayal of these sisters suggests that Martha processed life first through her thoughts, but Mary through her feelings. So Jesus comforted Martha with words of truth, but Mary with compassionate action, through which we also see his own intense reaction to death. Our translation doesn't really do it justice. The original for "deeply moved" (v.33) was used of snorting horses – it was a reaction of deep *anger* at the invasion of death into God's good world. And the word "troubled" speaks of intense inner turmoil. Then there is the shortest verse in the Bible, but one of the most profound (v.35): "Jesus wept." He sobbed. He knew he was going to raise Lazarus back to life, but he still let out strong emotions – his own grief, mixed with his compassion for his dearly loved friends' pain. This is the Jesus we worship – a God of compassion and deep feeling for our suffering!

4) The Statements of Truth and Faith

But I want to focus most on Jesus' and Martha's statements of truth and faith in vv.21-27. Martha began the exchange, not with an accusation, but with a simple statement of faith: "Lord, ... if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She'd seen Jesus heal miraculously; she knew he could have healed Lazarus. Yet her trust in him is unshaken: "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Oh, to have such faith when trouble hits!

Then Jesus gently began to stretch her mind beyond what she already believed about him: "Your brother will rise again." Martha's response demonstrates her strong trust in the truths revealed in the Jewish Scriptures – our Old Testament: "I know he will rise again in

the resurrection at the last day.” In many places, the Old Testament anticipates a Day of Judgement, when the world as we know it will end and the dead will rise – those who have followed God’s commands to eternal life, and those who have refused to live as he wants to eternal death. Martha believed this truth as most Jews did.

But Jesus had incredible news for her! “*I* am the resurrection and the life.” He actually used the exact words of God’s own self-identification, first given to Moses in Exodus 3:14: “I AM.” God had told the Jews that they could call him by his special name “I AM.” But Jesus claimed this name for himself at least eight times in John’s Gospel – in what we call the “I AM” sayings. And what he said about himself here proves that he truly was claiming to be equal with God, to be God himself. For he claimed to be the source of resurrection after death. No mere human could have that power! “Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” There is life after death that comes by trusting in Jesus, and that life will continue *forever!*

This is one of the greatest truths of the Christian faith! But it is only effective if we personally choose to *believe* it and speak out our belief. So, Jesus gently pushed Martha further, “Do you believe this?” “Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life?” In the midst of her grief, not having a clue that Jesus would soon reverse that grief, Martha’s response shows remarkable faith: “Yes, Lord, ... I believe that you are the Messiah [God’s promised Saviour], the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” ... Do *you* also believe this?

5) The Substantiation of Jesus’ Claim

This is not a call to *blind* faith. For we see, here, the *substantiation* of Jesus’ claim, the *proof* that he is who he said he is – a proof that would surprise even the faithful Martha, who protested at his command to open up the grave, because she could not imagine what was about to happen. But, her faith was sufficient to follow his command, even if she didn’t understand it. And so, she saw his glory, as did the others who witnessed this miracle, and as we do, who read about it. With just his voice, Jesus called the dead man to “come out” from the tomb (v.43). And he walked out – or probably waddled, given the grave clothes bound tightly around him!

Of course, *this* restoration of Lazarus' life did not last *forever*. This was not his final resurrection after death, but a temporary prolonging of earthly life. It was a *sign* to prove the truth of Jesus' claim to be the resurrection and the life. And, of course, we now have much stronger proof of his claim in his own *permanent* resurrection from death, which is the event that enables and guarantees our own resurrection to eternal life after death.

6) The Splitting of the Crowd

Interestingly, this miracle still split the crowd. Many "put their faith in him" (v.45). But others went and told the Pharisees (some of their leaders), whose reaction was to try to kill Jesus to stop everyone following him. And we have a choice about how we react too. Jesus says to each of us as he did to Martha, "Do you believe this? Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life?" Our answer to that question determines our eternal destiny – eternal life or eternal death (separation from God and all the good things he gives us). If you *do* believe it, have you ever confessed your belief to someone else? And what difference does your belief make to your life – to how you pray, how you cope with struggles and pain, how you treat others who are suffering, how ready you are to share your faith, how you cope in the face of death (the death of those you love and ultimately when you face your own death)? Jesus' promise to *all* who believe in him is that death is not the end – it is the turnstile to a new, better and everlasting life beyond the grave. Do you believe this?

[Pray and offer prayer ministry]