

John 11:1-45

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."

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, 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?"

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."

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."

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

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

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 and believes 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."

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."

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.

"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."

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

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."

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

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.

Reflection on the raising of Lazarus, 5th Sunday of Lent

Many of you will be familiar with the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. It's a very dramatic story - a story of despair turned to hope and celebration and this year it seems more poignant than ever.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were good friends of Jesus. He spent time at their home. He ate with them. He would visit them again only days before his death. Yet, when he gets word that Lazarus is sick - he does nothing. He waits 2 days before setting out to go to Bethany with his disciples.

To Mary, Martha and their friends who knew of Jesus' relationship with them this seems a strange and heartless way to act. In fact J faces criticism Martha says **"if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died"** Mary falls at his feet weeping and says the same thing, **"Lord IF you'd been here my brother wouldn't have died"** The people who'd gathered

to comfort the sisters said, "**Couldn't he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept him from dying?**"

Isn't this a universal question - God why didn't you show up? Why didn't you do something? It's a cry of anguish and pain. If God can heal the sick, then why didn't he heal my brother, my wife, my father, my child. God - where are you in my suffering?

But Jesus has a greater purpose. He doesn't come, not because he doesn't care, not because he doesn't feel for them, not because he doesn't love them - but because he's planning to do something far, far greater than they could have ever imagined and by doing this he will bring glory to God and show that as God's Son, the Creator of life, he has power over both life and death.

This is also a story of faith and, unexpectedly, it's Martha who demonstrates this. After telling Jesus that he could have come and healed her brother, she goes on, "**But I know that EVEN NOW God will give you whatever you wish.**" She declares her faith that her brother will rise again, on the last day - and Jesus replies with those wonderful words, "**I am the Resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?**" he asks. "**Yes Lord,**" Mary replies, "**I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.**"

Even though her brother lies dead in the tomb, Martha has faith. Even before Jesus acts, she can say with certainty that he is the Christ, the Son of God.

But what of Mary? When he saw her weeping Jesus also wept; he was deeply moved and troubled. It's now, when all hope seems gone, that Jesus acts. Lazarus has been in the tomb 4 days. No wonder they hesitate to take away the stone. No wonder Jesus has to call out in a LOUD voice - a voice literally loud enough to wake the dead - "**Lazarus, come out!**"

We can only imagine the onlookers - their horror at the idea of opening a tomb turning to amazement and joy. No wonder many then put their faith in Jesus!

It's easy to have faith when we see a miracle unfold in front of our eyes. It's easy to rejoice and praise God when things are going our way. But we are living now in strange and uncertain times. It's a situation none of us have ever encountered before. It's unsettling and frightening and nobody can give us a definite answer about when and how it will end. It's a time when **we** need the faith of Martha - a faith that believes and trusts that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

More than ever we might be crying out to God for help and asking, "Lord, where are you in all that's happening?" There are bound to be some who feel that God doesn't care about the suffering, the fear, the deaths, those who are grieving alone.

But I believe that as Jesus wept with Mary, so he weeps for us and with us. God hasn't abandoned us, he stands alongside us; he promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Maybe some of us feel as if we are entombed - separated from family and friends. We long to be set free - to be able to go where we want and see who we want. I've often wondered how Lazarus felt when he was set free from his grave clothes. I bet he thanked God every day for his new life; I bet he saw the world through new eyes.

One day we'll emerge from our tombs, but will our lives be the same? I hope not! I hope we shall have learned lessons about loving and caring for one another especially the most vulnerable. I hope we'll carry on looking out for our neighbours and volunteering to help those in need. I hope we'll remember that we are connected to the rest of humanity throughout the world - that tragedies that affect one country affect us all. I hope we'll remember how pollution levels fell and life thrived again in our canals and rivers - that we'll find new and better ways of caring for the earth. I hope too that we shall continue to be the church without walls. To share God's love and compassion; to share the hope that we have that the One who raised Lazarus to new physical life is the one who was himself raised to ETERNAL life and that he promised that life to us. More than that, he promises that LIFE to us here and now - the presence of his love; of his Holy Spirit to guide and sustain us; the promise that he is with us now and always in every circumstance of our life.