The Holy Gospel according to John 11:1-45

**11**Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. **2**Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. **3**So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” **4**But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” **5**Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, **6**after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. **7**Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” **8**The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” **9**Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. **10**But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them.” **11**After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” **12**The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” **13**Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. **14**Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. **15**For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” **16**Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” **17**When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. **18**Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, **19**and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. **20**When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. **21**Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. **22**But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” **23**Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” **24**Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” **25**Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, **26**and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” **27**She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” **28**When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” **29**And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. **30**Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. **31**The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. **32**When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” **33**When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. **34**He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” **35**Jesus began to weep. **36**So 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**Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. **39**Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” **40**Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” **41**So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me.  **42**I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” **43**When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” **44**The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” **45**Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

This is the Gospel of Christ

For the fourth consecutive Sunday, the gospel lesson comes from the great dramatic narratives of John, whose main theme is to prove conclusively that Jesus is the Son of God and that all who believe in Him will have eternal life. Clearly that could be considered more than a little important as we move through this waiting period of Lent, towards Easter, where Jesus is arrested, crucified, died, and is resurrected from that death. You may find it surprising why this reading appears on a Sunday in Lent. The raising of Lazarus is often associated with the resurrection, and it might seem more appropriate to come after Easter, rather than so close to Holy Week. Firstly, there was the story of Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, followed by the Samaritan woman at the well, and the healing of the man born blind, and now Lazarus and his family, bringing Lazarus back to life.

John was using the progressively clear events of Jesus’ journey to show he was indeed the son of God, and as we now see, these events culminated in raising his beloved friend Lazarus to life.

This raises several questions for us to consider. Why did Jesus procrastinate when he knew that his friend was seriously ill? Jesus certainly loved Lazarus and his two sisters and was often a visitor to their home in Bethany. To the surprise of his friends and disciples, however, Jesus did not go to Bethany immediately after the message of the serious illness of his friend Lazarus.

We know that Jesus loved not only Lazarus, but Martha and Mary as well. Naturally, Mary and Martha would grieve if Lazarus died. It is curious that he delayed his departure two days even though he had power to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Firstly, Jesus knew that during this time it was dangerous for him to travel anywhere near [Jerusalem](https://www.pilgrim-info.com/the-sanctuary-of-gethsemane/) since he was already sure that the religious authorities in Jerusalem planned to destroy him. Nevertheless, after two days Jesus was willing to pay that high price just so that he could help his friend, and also definitely demonstrate he was who he said he was.

Was Martha reproaching Jesus for failing to set out for Bethany immediately upon hearing of Lazarus’ illness—or is she simply expressing regret that Jesus didn’t happen to be present when Lazarus fell ill?  Almost certainly the latter:

Martha did not say, “If you had come” (as if referring to his two-day delay), but she said, “if you had been here” (expressing regret that he didn’t happen to be present when Lazarus fell ill).

Lazarus died soon after the messenger departed to inform Jesus of his illness.  Martha probably knew that Jesus could not have arrived in time to prevent Lazarus’ death, even if he had departed immediately upon receiving word of his friend’s illness.

When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus would have been dead four days. There was no ambiguity about Lazarus’ death, Jesus’ miracle, or God’s involvement in the process.

However, there are many sceptics of this story. Some argue that the telling of this story was just a publicity stunt for Jesus by Mary and Martha.

Others argue that in the other gospels, the three synoptic gospels, the raising of Lazarus is not mentioned. If other writers knew of this Lazarus story, how could they fail to mention it? When it comes down to it the question is how much credibility can we assign to John’s retelling of this story?

Well, John is thought to be the young disciple mentioned a number of times and it was clearly quite late in his life that he wrote his Gospel. Mark was the first around 70AD for John. Matthew and Luke around 85-90 AD. Theologians estimate about 90AD which would make him a reasonably old man. The other three didn’t mention these wonders because they weren’t there when these miracles happened, probably primarily because they weren’t disciples, and John probably was there, from the wedding at Cana, through to the raising of Lazarus.

Picture – the last supper

Some Theologians argue that there are accounts of raising people from the dead in Mark and Luke, but in these cases, it was straight after death, which means these deaths could have been mistaken for a coma. But Lazarus however had been dead for four days and the descriptions of his condition are rather vivid and graphic, that he had indeed been dead for some time. This was not a coma.

John has led his readers steadily and deliberately to this point. Every example he gave of Jesus’ increasing power was deliberately chosen, and like all good narratives, leads the reader to a logical climax.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life”. This statement is the heart of this whole Gospel. While we could call this story the resurrection of Lazarus, it is more importantly the revelation that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. This is one of several “I am” statements by Jesus in this Gospel—statements that reveal Jesus’ true identity. Jesus is the bread of life, and the light of the world. His statement that he is the resurrection, and the life is the high point of these “I am” statements. When Jesus asked Martha if she believed, she replied with a threefold statement of faith. Jesus is (1) the Messiah (2) the Son of God and (3) the saviour they have been waiting for. She said **“Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, God’s Son, he who comes into the world”.**

Of course naturally Lazarus eventually died, and the death rate since has still to this day held steady at 100 percent, but this is Jesus’ promise that spiritual life is possible after physical death—that physical death can be a prelude to resurrection.

And what is the significance of Lazarus’ awakening from the dead? It is more than a miracle event. This is the “mark” of God’s promise firstly that his power over life and death is also present in his son, thus all who have died believing in Christ will be resurrected into eternal life. That is what the story tells us, and that is what really matters.

The Christian faith, which is a confession of our faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in God’s redemptive power, has its apex in proclaiming the resurrection of the dead into eternal life with God. It is our faith and our hope.

John’s message was not just to reaffirm who Jesus was, it was intended to encourage his readers and for us to believe in him and behave in ways that emulate his constant example of helping anywhere he was needed.

God gives us the power of His Holy Spirit so that we may live in Christ. Even now we can experience the power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in our personal lives. The Holy Spirit is always ready to change and transform us into men and women of faith, hope, and love, leaving some issues in our past behind. You and I are our own persons, and we don’t have to be afraid of the things we once were, because in Jesus we have a new life. The following of Jesus is a second chance at life, and as a worship community, we have shown our own willingness to give others a second chance at life. We all do what we can, and it is highly satisfying to live out Christ’s example in our own way, helping others to get a second chance at a better life. Can I just show you what it feels like to receive a second chance at life. Like Lazarus who was offered a new beginning, let’s watch these others expressing the joy of a new lease on life, given by people who cared enough to help.

Amen.

Video