

I Go to Awaken Him

Lent 5

Pastor Josh Frazee

John 11:1-45

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Do you doubt? Are there times in your life where you know what Jesus has said, and yet you just can't bring yourself to trust that what He has said is true and has or will happen?

Some of you have undoubtedly been through so many of these that you know that God keeps His Word no matter what. For others of you, though, perhaps this is your first, or at least your first major time of testing.

Well, maybe testing is the wrong word... For Mary and Martha and Jesus' disciples in our Gospel text, Jesus didn't say that they were undergoing "testing." Sometimes there are times of testing—the Scriptures say so—but then there are times when things happen so that God's glory may be displayed.

Remember what we heard about last weekend? The man born blind? And it wasn't that the man had sinned or that his parents had sinned that he had been born that way. It was for the very moment when Jesus would glorify His Heavenly Father by healing the man's sight. And Jesus gave him more than just physical sight, but also the sight of faith.

So, too, this weekend, we have an account where something happens—not to test someone—but for the glory of God to be displayed. Lazarus died, and Jesus was going to awaken him.

Verse 1

When we look at our Gospel text, we see Jesus says exactly these things: "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." And a little later, He said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." And, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

We have covered many texts over the last few weeks since Ash Wednesday. The end of Lent is approaching. Even the disciples know that things are not good for our Lord in Jerusalem, which is very near Bethany—not good according to their thoughts. But in God's thoughts it was the perfect time for giving them a sign for their faith.

So Jesus goes. He goes when it is dangerous for Him to go. He goes out of His great love for Mary and Martha, His disciples, and all those who would witness His raising Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus goes, and His disciples decide to go with Him. Their reason, as Thomas who was also called the Twin put it, is "that (they) may die with him." According to some commentators, it is up for debate as to whether he said this in sarcasm—a grim humor in the face of probable death—or great devotion. If it were devotion, it could only be credited to the Holy Spirit.

In these opening verses we hear of the disciples' doubt, and of their decision to go with Jesus. But we also heard what Jesus said about Lazarus' illness not being one leading to death and that He was going to awaken Lazarus. While the disciples doubted, Jesus did not doubt what He needed to do. He went to Bethany to give glory to God through His Word and His actions. This is the same Jesus the Spirit has led us to have faith in, and the same Jesus *who is the reason* the Spirit is showing us that we don't need to have doubt.

Verse 2

When Jesus came, He learned that Lazarus had already passed away. Then Martha came to meet Him. Jesus tells Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha replies, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day;” but Jesus replies, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Sometimes in our lives, it feels as though Jesus is too late. The event is over. Yet we know that God’s ways are not our ways. We know and believe that things will work out eventually—at the resurrection, as Martha pointed out. And that is true. Everything will work out at the resurrection. But it is not true that God will only deal with us at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He deals with us in the present as well. No matter what is going on, no matter how dark things appear, God is with us with His light Jesus Christ.

For Martha, Jesus speaks His light to her. He speaks the Word. And He doesn’t just speak about a resurrection which will happen at a later time. No, He speaks to her about the resurrection that He Himself is. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life...(and then He asked) Do you believe this?” He was calling Martha to believe right then and there, not just about the future, but that He was present with her even at this sad time when Lazarus had passed away.

Today, Jesus asks you the same question: Do you believe this? Do you believe that He is the resurrection and the life, and that He is always here for you? There is that popular theme song from the sitcom “Friends” which says “I’ll be there for you.” That is what many might define as a good friend. Isn’t Jesus closer than our closest friend? Isn’t He closer than your closest friend?

A little later Mary came to meet Jesus, and those who had been consoling her went with her. Jesus asked where Lazarus had been laid, and when the people reply “Come and see,” He wept. His weeping caused two reactions: one group replied, “See how he loved him!” but another group replied, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

Verse 3

Jesus arrived at the tomb, had them take away the stone, and then asked, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” In response, the people moved away the stone in front of Lazarus’ tomb. Then Jesus prayed aloud, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

That is what Jesus said before He called Lazarus out of his tomb. We know how this account turned out. What we don’t know is how God will work things out today. You don’t, and I don’t. No one does. But what about in your past? How has God acted in your life before today? Have you had any times of doubt in which God demonstrated His love to you through Jesus by ending your doubt over that situation? Won’t God also act in this situation you are facing today? Isn’t God already acting in it, just in ways that none of us realize?

Once Lazarus came out, our text concluded saying, “Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.” That is the result of that eyewitness account according to God’s Word. God said that’s what happened, so we know we can trust it. Today, we are still called to believe, even when we haven’t seen some of these things.

We didn’t see Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. We didn’t see Jesus go to the cross for our sins—yours and mine. We didn’t see Jesus Himself rise from the dead as we’ll hear about in just a couple weeks.

And yet, we believe. God has given you His Holy Spirit so that you might believe in Jesus as your Savior, not only in the future, but that He is with you today. God has said in His Word that He is working all things together for good for those who believe, and He has given you His Holy Spirit on account of Jesus' death for your sins, so that you can believe it. So that you can believe it, and not doubt it. After all, this is Jesus, who went to awaken Lazarus and did; and this is God, who would later awaken His Son, and God did. In Jesus' Name. Amen.