



John 11:17-27,38-45 – ¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles 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. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” 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 odor, for he has been there four days.” ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would 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, put their faith in him.

When your hope is gone, Jesus is there



The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. (Psalm 118:16-17)

The sound of loud wailing filled the air outside and those cries were echoed in the soft, subdued sobs coming from inside the house. Doctors, home remedies, “sleeping it off,” nothing seemed to work. But they knew One who could help. So the sisters called on their dear Friend, the one who had broken bread with them and was a familiar face in their home. He could help. But he didn’t come. Instead of walking the couple of miles to their house, he stayed put. It had all happened so fast. Their brother was sick one day and dead the next. And now there they were, bereaved. Feeling helplessly alone in a crowd of people. Their eyes stained red from tears and their noses chapped from rubbing away their sadness. But then, he showed up - he and his disciples. One of the sisters, Martha, ran out to meet him and with a broken heart she uttered a question that’s been on the minds and mouths of God’s people since the Garden. *“Where were you, Lord? Where were you when I needed you most?”* **If you had been here, my brother would not have died.**

One of the truths that resurfaces over and over again in the gospels is this – Jesus had a plan for his ministry including a strong sense of timing. But in an account like this one, you have to wonder: is this an example of impeccable timing? Everyone knew how close Jesus was with Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. When he heard that Lazarus, his beloved friend, was sick, Jesus didn’t rush over. Instead, John’s gospel tells us that he waited **four days!** And you know what happened – Lazarus was dead. Jesus loved him. But is that love - to let the tears keep flowing? Is that love - to allow the stench of death and decay to linger in the nostrils of the family? Is that love – to wait over half a week while the gaping hole in their hearts only grows? You can imagine over that four day span, Mary and Martha watching and waiting, hoping and praying – but seeing nothing. It seemed that their hope was gone. But then Jesus showed up.

Does it ever seem like Jesus makes you wait, sometimes unnecessarily long amounts of time? You pray and pray and work and try, but it doesn’t seem like the marriage is getting any easier. You pray and trust, and hope and smile, but the doctor’s diagnosis is still that ugly six letter word it was at your last checkup – cancer. You pray and trust, you rest your hope in the word and promises of God, but the mortgage is due again and the mountain of debt gets just a little bit higher. You pray and serve and help trust, but it seems like finding joy in your work is a long lost dream. *“Where are you, Lord? Where are you when I need you most?”* Questions like those arise from a heart of faith – maybe a hurting or confused faith, but trust nonetheless. We know God is good and promises to work all things for our good, but when what we *know* doesn’t match what we *see*, that’s when the questions start. All of us, if we’re honest with ourselves, have wondered at one time or another why Jesus doesn’t seem to be doing anything. *Why would he make me go through this? This isn’t how it should be!* Then there’s the temptation to give way to faith’s ugly opposite: frustration. *If you had been doing your job, Jesus...if you had been working according to my plan, my timeline, then things would obviously go better for me.* Sometimes, Jesus makes us wait, but he always makes it better – in his own way and his own time. When you think your hope is gone, Jesus is there.



That's where Mary and Martha found their comfort and their confidence when it looked like their hope was gone. Listen to what Martha said to Jesus, **"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."** Even now, Jesus, even now. In spite of all of this – what I see with my tear filled eyes, and hear with my ears, and feel with my broken heart, even now, Jesus, I trust you – your purpose, your power, your promise. And Jesus doesn't leave her hanging. **"Your brother will rise again."** I know Jesus, at the resurrection – and how wonderful it will be! Martha, you're right, but I get to tell you that you don't have the whole picture. **I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** Jesus pointed her to himself as the sole source of resurrection power and resurrection comfort. Martha, the resurrection isn't something you have to wait years and years for. It's the One who's standing right in front of you! All who trust in Jesus as their Savior already have his resurrection promise – it's as good as done. New life, new purpose, new hope! For you, dear child of God, death has no power over you. Though your body may expire, in Christ you will never die.

One important detail of this account that isn't in our gospel lesson is the reaction Jesus had to the death of his friend, Lazarus. The shortest verse in the English Bible, but also one of the most impactful, **Jesus wept.** He felt sadness. When someone dies, especially if it's a young person or a sudden death, people might say, "It was God's will..." An attempt at comfort, sure – but look at the tears streaming down the face of Jesus and tell me, was death ever a part of God's plan for the world? God's creation was perfect, humanity was created as perfect, God's design was for humans to live and live in him! But then sin entered the world and death followed with it. Ever since then, our world has been a slave to the vicious cycle of sin and death, sin and death. Death of mankind wasn't a part of God's plan – and Jesus shows that it breaks his heart.

Death is an unwelcome intrusion into a world that wasn't ready for it. And if you've ever looked death in the face – not the well manicured and made-up face you see in the funeral home – but death as it truly is, you see the one thing that matches the ugliness of human sin. It makes all the sense in the world, **the wages of sin is death.** Death is undeniably ugly. We can try to deny it, put it off, shape it in our minds with some new philosophy, or call it "a part of life." But death isn't just a part of life – it's happening right now. Human death is simply the last step and the period on a life-long run on sentence. This is the wages of sin – an ugly, inescapable reality. For Lazarus, for you, for me, for every child of Adam and Eve who's ever walked this earth – there's no escape. There's no return. There's no hope – but then Jesus showed up.

Sin and death break Jesus' heart. So he did something about it. He didn't shy away from the ugliness of humanity's sin and its rightful wages. Instead he jumped in. He didn't look down from heaven and lament the waywardness of his once perfect creation. Instead he came down from heaven; trading the eternal praise of angels for a human body – one that itself would be subject to death as the wages of sin, but not for his own sins. For yours, for mine. The ugliness of our sin gave way to the ugliest scene in recorded history – as nails pierced the hands and feet of the God-man, Jesus. His cries from the cross, his bloody suffering, his lifeless body – take a good look and see what your sin deserves. And see it paid in full in Christ. He died. But he didn't stay dead. This is the majesty and the miracle of the gospel, the one who paid for the sins of the world with his death on the cross is the one who triumphs over death itself by rising from the dead. And now, he promises his victory to you.



And in order to prove the certainty of his greatest promise, he performed arguably the greatest miracle of his ministry. **Take away the stone...Lazarus, come out!** The Son of God shows his ultimate power over every enemy – even the devil’s ultimate warrior, death. With a word from the mouth of Christ, the unthinkable, the impossible happens – the dead man comes to life. Did you know that Christ’s word still brings hopeless people from death to life? It happens at a font – a few splashes of water and a promise of God – and what happens? We are connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus and because he lives, we live. The word of Christ still brings hopeless people from death to life. It happens in a wafer of bread and a sip of wine as the living Christ gives you his own body and blood given into death for your sins. The word of Christ still brings hopeless dead people to life. It happens through the mouth of an unimpressive looking man standing in front of you – as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins.

And so what about the times Jesus seems to make you wait? What about when you’re still searching and searching for happiness and fulfillment? What then? What happens when your life seems to be a testimony to the inevitability of Murphy’s Law rather than the certainty of the gospel? What about when you’re at the end of your rope and honestly wondering if I can keep moving forward? What about when your hope is gone? Listen to the voice of the **God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.** Watch and learn that in Christ and his promises, **our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.** Speak up with the Spirit-given faith of Martha and say, **Even now, Lord,** I trust in your promises. **Even now, Lord** I know I have hope even when all earthly resources and solutions dissolve. **Even now, Lord,** I know that not even death has power over what your grace can do. Remember, because of the resurrection of Jesus you can have a spring in your step and a smile on your face – his death defeated your death; his life guarantees your eternity. Even when your hope seems gone, Jesus is there – with his power and with his promise, **whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** Your Savior has opened the door to eternal life, and left it open behind him.

Amen

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:7)