

Bible Study January 5-11 Lazarus of Bethany

Read the verses and ponder the questions several times a day. And discuss the study with others. Jesus says where two or more are gathered together in his name, he is there with them.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the penultimate sign of God's intention to offer salvation through Jesus. Only the resurrection of Jesus, himself, remained as the climactic sign of God's plan. Death was for the people of Jesus' time, and remains for us, the most unresolvable fact of God's creation. Why would God not give us eternal life here on earth? The story of Lazarus asks us to look at life, and death, in an entirely different way. Read the entire story (John 11 and the first eleven verses of John 12) and then consider the words and actions of Jesus in the lives of those who witnessed them and in your life.

Monday John 11:1,4-6 (NRSV)

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ... But when Jesus heard of it [that Lazarus was ill], 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. Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Mary and Martha, according to the story, had sent a message to Jesus that their brother was ill and hoped that Jesus would do something about it. Rather, Jesus sits tight and has a greater plan for Lazarus. Jesus, as Son of God, uses Lazarus and his ultimate misfortune, his death, to teach about life and death. The Old Testament is full of stories of God using misfortune to teach important lessons. Jesus does the same.

Have you experienced instances, like Martha and Mary, where you have asked God to intervene and God sits tight?

Tuesday John 11:11- 14 (NRSV)

[Jesus said to his disciples] "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

Jesus now sets out his plan. Though (as usual) he has to bring his disciples on board. They have seen him raise the daughter of Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, and though others said she was dead, Jesus assured them she was sleeping. Now, Jesus is ready to take on death and to teach a new way of thinking about life. He assures the disciples that Lazarus was dead.

Sometimes, we are not prepared to believe what we see before our very eyes. Sometimes, we are fooled, like in the presence of a magician, and should be skeptical.

Can you think of a time, like the disciples, when you had to be assured that what was about to happen could be believed?

Wednesday John 11:20-27 (NRSV)

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never

die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When Jesus asks Martha if she believes, she tells him what was well understood, that he is the Messiah and the Son of God whom God has sent to be among them. A much harder idea to grasp is that she might die, yet continue to live, and that living in Jesus, as the Son of God, she will never die. If we live "in" Jesus, as God, and not simply in our mortal existence, then life and death have much different realities. God, through Jesus and through the raising of Lazarus and ultimately through the resurrection of Jesus, wants us not to be bound by our limited ways of looking at our lives and our deaths. In 11:44, Jesus says of Lazarus, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Can you think of a time that your way of looking at and understanding something changed completely?

What are the benefits of living "in God"?

Thursday John 11:33-37 (NRSV)

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

The story of Lazarus also demonstrates the way in which God wants to be understood, as a loving and compassionate God, a God not afraid to show love, and a God who can share the happiness and the sorrow of his friends. Jesus was moved and upset by the sorrow of those who mourned Lazarus, even though he knew the end of the story. He was "with" these others; he was the promise of God "with" us.

We understand love and compassion and care through our experience with those who offer us these things. That Jesus, as Son of Man, could be moved and could weep tells us how the Son of God will continue to relate to us.

How do you experience Jesus?

Can you think of a time when Jesus was "with" you?

Friday John 11:45-48 (NRSV)

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.

Verses after this passage give Caiaphas' prophecy of Jesus' sacrifice and death. Some saw what Jesus had done, and they believed. Others saw the same things and were afraid. Many times in history a people have been torn between the promise of a new way forward and the fear of losing what they have held dear in the past. The signs of God's promise through Christ were in Jesus' time, and continue to be in our times, eye catching. Yet, sometimes they are not easy to grasp and sometimes not easy to live with. "What are we to do?"

Have you ever been torn between God's promise, or what you believed God was asking, and your life as you were living it?

How did you resolve what you saw "on one hand" and what you saw "on the other hand"?

Saturday John 12:9-11 (NRSV)

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and believing in Jesus.

Signs and wonders will not necessarily make your life easier. Sometimes it is the messenger that gets killed. And sometimes, as with Lazarus, we do not choose to be that messenger. We simply have to trust that God's plan has a greater purpose. The Bible says no more about Lazarus. Some histories suggest that Lazarus fled Judea for Cyprus and was involved with Paul and Barnabas in spreading the nascent Christianity. (Others suggest, more fancifully, that Lazarus and Mary and Martha were put to sea in a boat and landed in southern France, also to further establish the Church.)

Have you or someone you know been involved, like Lazarus, in God's plan in way that threaten your well-being?

How did you escape?

God, thank you for life in you. Amen

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