

Today's scripture is filled with contrasts and paradoxes. Jesus is the word, from the beginning, in whom is life. Yet here we see that the life he gives to Lazarus, raising him from the dead, is the very thing that leads to his death. This story is followed by John 11:45-54 which concludes with the narrative explanation "So from that day on [the ruling council of the chief priests and the Pharisees] planned to put Jesus to death."

All of the miraculous signs of Jesus point to who he is and what he has come to give humanity (and are followed by the **I am** statements in John's gospel). None of them are more closely related to the reality of resurrection life through his resurrection than this story of Lazarus rising from the dead.

Bethany: Today the town of Bethany, just east of Jerusalem, is called "El 'Azariyeh" – a name derived from "Lazarus".

Mary and her sister Martha: These sisters appear in the other gospels only in Luke 10:38. It's curious that John expects the readers of his gospel to be more familiar with the names of Mary and Martha, than that of Lazarus, for he associates the village with them alone.

he whom you love: Throughout John's gospel there is reference to a "disciple whom Jesus loved" – this phrase in John 11 leads many to think it refers to Lazarus.

the light is not in them: We tend to hear a new age-y sort of inner light reference. But the ancient Jews believed that light resided in the eye (not exterior in the world) as we see pointed to in Matthew 6:22-23: ²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

Lazarus has fallen asleep: This is a common saying or euphemism for death. Here the disciples seem to think that his restful sleep indicates that the illness has passed.

four days: This makes clear that Lazarus is truly dead. The rabbis of the time believed that the soul hovered near the body for three days, but after that there was no hope for resuscitation, death was irreversible.

stayed at home: What the text literally says is that "Mary sat quietly [at home]" it's not that she's lazy or unable to walk, women in mourning at that time sat on the floor of the house. Compare this to Ezekiel 8:14: ¹⁴ "Then [God] brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord; women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz." It's not a sign of a lack of faith, but an indication of the depth of her grief and brokenness.

Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah.... It is the presence of Jesus, the one coming into the world, that gives...

SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 2.18.2018

John 11:1-45
New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ 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

Martha hope in the midst of grief. Theodicy is the confession of God's goodness amidst experiences that make evil undeniable. It's not easy to do, or believe. We often cry to God with the sisters, "if only you had been here!"³ Martha encourages us to believe that God is the one who moves into the world -- with all of its darkness, brokenness, and grief. Martha reminds us that even in unanswered questions and unmet requests, we are not alone. Lindsey Trozzo, www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3404

the one coming into the world: this confession of Jesus' power and divinity points back to a similar proclamation after the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6:14 "14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."" as well as the series of titles given for Jesus in the first chapter of John:

1:41 - "We have found the Messiah"

1:45 - "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

1:49 - "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved:

these two verbs used here indicate both grief and indignation, mourning and righteous anger. Was he angry at Lazarus? Or death and illness?

come and see: this is exactly what was said in John 1:39 "39 [Jesus] said to [the disciples of John the Baptizer], "Come and see."" There Jesus invites others to life in faith...here others invite Jesus to come and see death. It's a radical contrast which likely points back to the opening affirmation of the gospel about life in Jesus: "1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1:1-5

Signs: This is the 7th and final sign of the 7 "miracles" in John: Changing water into wine at Cana in John 2:1-11 - "the first" Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum in John 4:46-54 Healing the paralytic at Bethesda in John 5:1-15 Feeding the 5000 in John 6:5-14 Jesus walking on water in John 6:16-24 Healing the man blind from birth in John 9:1-7 The raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-45

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in this story?
- With whom do you identify in the story? Why?
- Is this story more about Mary's confession of faith of Lazarus being raised from the dead? Why?
- How does the story of this miraculous sign and radical confession of faith intersect and touch your own life today? How is God speaking to you in these words?

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.