

John 11:1-7: *Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4But 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." 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."*

Mary and Martha and Lazarus and Jesus. Friends. Close friends.

Who do you call to say, "My brother is in the hospital."? When it is a close friend you don't need to say any more. Prayers will follow. Cards. A visit.

So it was the sisters sent the message: "Lord, your close friend is sick."

And did Jesus rush off to see his friend? No, he waited two days.

"This sickness won't result in death," Jesus said, "instead this sickness will bring glory to God so that the Son of God will receive glory through it."

When one I love is sick, health and healing are everything to me. But Jesus seems to be saying that the glory of God matters even more.

As we read through this gospel account remember that without Lazarus' sickness none of this would happen. The faith that is born in Mary and Martha might never have been without this illness.

Think of your life – the moment you felt closest to God. I am guessing that it was when danger and death were closest also. All the clutter of life is cleared away and in that extreme moment what God means to you is clear.

John 11:8-16: *. 8The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9Jesus 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. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them*

*plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*

Death. The threat of death from Jesus enemies – the death that has claimed Lazarus – these come together in the decision to go to Bethany.

The doctor who treats the highly contagious disease – the soldier who battles to guard the lives of those he loves – the missionary who proclaims Christ in China – loving and risking death go together. But Jesus says that when you see the light of the world the darkness has no power. Jesus is that light.

*John 11:17-27: 17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

Martha came to Jesus. Rushed to Jesus. Shared her heart with 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 him."

Maybe she thought Jesus would actually do something. Maybe she was only saying the right words. How is it for you?

Do you find yourself saying the right words even as you prepare your heart and mind for the funeral? Or do you pray, "Come Lord Jesus" expecting him to burst into the room? Well in this story it does not depend on Martha's faith, nor Mary's but Jesus desire to bring glory to God.

"Your brother will come back to life" to which Martha says, "Yea I know – that day is coming."

But Jesus says, "I am the one who brings people back to life, and I am life itself. Those who believe in me will live even if they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

With her brother wrapped up in the tomb Jesus says there is no death for those who believe in him. Jesus is life that can never be taken away – he is life itself.

Maybe it is only when a brother is in tomb – a grandfather in the grave – a son in Afghanistan in danger every hour – only then that we know how precious is this word of Jesus. Death has no power over those who belong to Jesus, believe in Jesus. Death has no power over you.

*John 11:28-37: 28When 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.” 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31The 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. 32When 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.”*

*33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

Jesus cried.

And people said, “Couldn’t Jesus have kept him from dying?”

After all the prayers we prayed for my mother that was my question: “Couldn’t Jesus have kept her from dying?”

Jesus cried. Is he no different from you and me after all? Powerless in the face of death?

Maybe Jesus cried for Mary – for those who came to mourn with her. Maybe he cried for you and I as well. For the one who is the resurrection and the life offers himself to us – and do we believe in the power of death more than we believe in him? Do we live in anxiety and fear rather than faith? Do we believe in rotting bodies more than we believe in the one who gives eternal life? Mary was in the presence of the one who is life – yet tears clouded her eyes.

*John 11: 38-45: 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus 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.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said,*

*“Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I 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.” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The 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.”*

*45Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*

One writer commenting on this verse took note of the fact that Lazarus came out with strips of cloth still wrapped around him. One day those strips would be wound around his lifeless body once more.

But when Peter and John came to the tomb that Easter morning the strips of cloth were all left in the tomb – Jesus would never be wrapped in them again.

As wonderful as that moment must have been – death was only delayed.

All the healing we ask for – all the blessings we beg – they only delay the day when the coffin will be closed over the lifeless body. But the life Jesus gives is eternal.

It is good that we would keep things in perspective. What will matter more to the children of this parish – entertaining programs – innovative lessons – lots of attention paid to them. These are not eternal.

What of all the concerns about worship and parking and music and space that have occupied our minds of late? These also are not eternal.

But Jesus is the resurrection and the life and the life he gives is eternal.

He is the reason we gather, share our time and our talents here and in the world.

Believe in him. Even though you die yet shall you live and whoever lives and believes in him will never die.