

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." 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."

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." 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?" 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.

"Lord, he whom you love is ill."

That was the message they sent to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." Odd that the message carried no name with it - just the designation, he whom you love.

Are you loved by Jesus? If you get sick would it be enough for me to pray, Lord, he whom you love is ill, she whom you love is ill. Would Jesus know it is you that I am calling on him for?

And what would he do if it were you? Would Jesus drop everything and come running for you? Or would he wait two days? What if you died before he came to heal you?

Would your loved ones greet Jesus with these words, "Lord, if you had been here my daughter would not have died?" Lord, if you had been here my husband would not have died." Lord, if you had been here my mother would not have died."

Would Jesus weep with them then as he wept with Mary that day so long ago? Or would he do as he did with Martha, say to your loved ones, "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."

And then after four days or forty days or four thousand days or four million days will he come to your tomb, your grave, your resting place and cry out your name with a loud voice? Yes, he will call you out of death and into life and you will come forth after your sleep of death - alive. And there will be a party as there must have been that day when Lazarus was raised from the dead but the party God has planned for the day of your resurrection will go on and on and on and you will never tire of meeting all the people there.

The story we read today is your story and mine. We do call on Jesus and sometimes he delays in coming and death smothers a life that is precious to us. "Where were you, Lord?" is the question of our hearts. We weep and Jesus cries with us. But the day is coming when all the tears will be dried. The day is coming when every one whom Jesus loves will hear his voice and come forth from death.

At this very moment Jesus is on his way to Bethany. He himself has died, he was sealed in the tomb and the Father in heaven called him into life again. Now he journeys to every village where He is inviting people to

accompany him on this journey. Along the way he will ask you to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and visit those who are sick or in prison. All of them are people whom Jesus loves. Along the way there is sorrow and along the way there is joy. In every moment Jesus wants you to remember how the story ends. He will call your name and you will come out of death into life. And the party will begin. Amen.

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