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Do You Believe This? – John 11

Do you believe this? A man is dead. He is put into a tomb, wrapped in burial cloths, and his body is beginning to decay. His family is mourning his death and Jesus comes along . . . tells the guy to get up and come out of the tomb and he does. Do you believe this?

I have seen people die. There is a clear line between life and death. Skin color changes. So the does skin texture. The body loses its warmth. Muscles become rigid. In death, life is gone. It dissipates slowly until it is gone. And we understand that this is final. No one comes back from it.

In our passage from John 11 this morning, the family of Lazarus knew that Lazarus was very sick and near death and they got a hold of Jesus and asked if he could come and heal Lazarus. They believed that Jesus could heal him. They had seen and heard about Jesus approaching sick people and transforming them by the power of God and making them well.

But Jesus did not come soon enough and Lazarus died. We are told that Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha, two women that Jesus knows well and is close to. Mary and Martha are clearly upset over the death of their brother, and to be honest probably a little frustrated that Jesus did not come and heal Lazarus.

Jesus eventually shows up, but by that time Lazarus has been dead for four days. Family and friends were still gathering around Mary and Martha and comforting them, but when Martha heard that Jesus was finally on his way she went to greet him. In verse 21, Martha says, **“Lord . . . if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”** Her disappointment was intense because she believed in Jesus so strongly and expected so much from him.

How many times have we said something like this to God? As we stand by the bed or the casket of someone that we know that has died, we cry out in grief . . . God if you had just healed them, they would not have died. God if you had just been here, I would have gotten that new job. God if you had changed the heart of my spouse, we would not be divorced. God if you would just transform my kid, we wouldn't

fight about everything. There are many times that we stand before God and we call out from our grief . . .
“if you had been here . . .”

After pointing out to Jesus that Lazarus would not have died if he had arrived earlier, Martha demonstrates that while she is deeply grieved over the loss of her brother and disappointed that Jesus had not been there, she puts her grief and disappointment at Jesus' feet. Martha says in verse 22, “But I know that even now (when my brother has been dead for 4 days) God will give you whatever you ask.”

Martha does not put her wants onto Jesus though. Clearly she would like to have her brother back, but she does not ask Jesus to do this. In fact it probably never even crosses her mind that it is possible. Instead, Martha appeals to Jesus' all-powerful nature, again not expecting anything or feeling entitled to a particular remedy, but **simply leaving all doors open.** She honestly has no idea how Jesus could help her now. Her brother is already dead . . . life has left him. Her mind has no expectations, but she knows Jesus and believes he could do something. She puts her uncertainty back on Jesus. **“Even now God will give you whatever you ask.” She is completely his. Her whole trust is in him even when the outcome is not to her pleasing.**

This is a demonstration of great faith by Martha. Normally when we find ourselves in a place where we have called out for God's help and nothing happens we imagine the situation is over and finished. We remove God from it and go on. God is for us the magic healer man that we invite in when we need him, but when our perceived needs pass, so does our attention to God.

(diagram) Slide 1, our relationship with God is like that of a doctor or an accountant. It is a contractual relationship. (in some parts of the world, Dr.'s only get paid when patients are healthy)

Slide 2, our relationship with God is personal. It persists no matter the circumstances. Martha’s faith in God did not dissipate at the experience of hardship.

As Martha walks down this life path with God and with all doors open, her conversation with Jesus continues. **Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again.** Martha says, I know he will rise again spiritually. Martha was Jewish and most Jews believed that in the end of time or the world that all of the righteous people would be resurrected. She knows Lazarus will be among these righteous because of his faithfulness.

I get the impression that Martha might have been slightly annoyed. Almost like when we lose a loved one and someone says, “well at least they are in heaven.” It is true and important to recognize, but it doesn't make all of our loss and grief instantly disappear as we stand by the casket.

But Jesus clarifies what he meant. He says, I am not talking about some far off resurrection, **“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” (SLIDE)**

Then Jesus asks Martha that million dollar question that we began with . . . **“Do you believe this?”**

Do you believe this? **This is the crux of why we are here today.** This is why millions of people around the world are worshiping God this morning and millions of others are still in bed. Do you believe that Jesus is truly the resurrection and the life?

Several weeks ago I was meeting with a guy and discussing Jesus with him. He did not believe that Jesus was who he claimed to be. As we discussed where he was at in his consideration of Jesus, he said that nearly everything that he had learned and experienced over the past several months through spending time with Christians and reading the Bible, led him to think that Jesus was who he claimed to be, but he couldn't be certain and thus was not ready to commit.

I told him that God did not call him to be certain, but to believe. He quickly said, “but I am a thinker and I can't believe something unless I am certain about it.” I told him that was not true and that I imagined that he believed a whole host of things of which he was not certain of. For instance, I believe my mom loves me, but I am not absolutely certain. Maybe she is faking it. Maybe she is just using me for the grandkids. **The point is that we regularly choose to believe things not because of absolute certainty, but because of overwhelming evidence.** There are many moments in our lives when evidence takes us to a point of decision, but it is only belief that seals the deal.

Belief is simply trusting and having confidence that something is true.

Martha believes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. And it is this belief and full trust that opens the door for God's miraculous work. It is her faith in Jesus that floats this entire story.

After professing her faith in Jesus, **Martha runs off to get her sister Mary** and to let her know that Jesus has finally shown up. Mary then comes to meet Jesus. She is weeping over the loss of her brother and the Jewish family and friends that come with her are also weeping.

At this sight, Jesus expresses two emotions that I think help us to see the heart of God. First, the passage says that Jesus was “deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” It is hard to tell from this translation, but the tone is frustration and even anger on Jesus' part. The Message translation says it this way, **“When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him.”**

And then later on when Jesus actually goes to Lazarus' tomb, we see this same frustration. Jesus is angered with the death of Lazarus. Jesus as the resurrection and the life is repulsed by death. Jesus has come to wrestle with death himself, and to die . . . but then to destroy it and defeat it. Death is Jesus' enemy.

Jesus demonstrates another emotion in this text as well. As Jesus is looking upon the grief and weeping of the family and friends of Lazarus we find the shortest verse in the entire bible. **“Jesus wept.”**

Jesus grieved for Lazarus and his family and friends. He cared deeply for them and was saddened by their loss. Our God lives life with us. When we experience loss and hurt and pain, God is in solidarity with us. We get a glimpse of that when we see our children hurt. We hurt with them.

A couple weeks ago . . . and you can laugh at this if you want . . . Dana was at the playground with Adelaide and Miriam and a girl who was probably 7 looked at Miriam and said, “that girl has big ears.” Dana said she wanted to shove that 7 year old head first down the big slide, but chose instead to say, “yeah, but she will grow into them.” By the way the ears are my side of the family's fault. But if Miriam could understand what that girl was saying, we would have deeply hurt with her.

God hurts with us. Jesus wept as he saw those he loved weeping.

Jesus makes his way towards the tomb of Lazarus. And as he stands outside of it he calls out for some of those gathered around to **“take away the stone”** that was covering the entrance. Martha warns him about the smell. After all Lazarus has been dead for 4 days and he can't smell very good.

But Jesus tells her to chill out. He reminds her in verse 40, **“did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”** And then Jesus looks up and speaks to his Father and then called out in a loud voice, **“Lazarus, come out.”** And this ancient biblical text, this revelation from God, says that **“the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.”**

Do you believe this?

Nearly 2000 years ago God put on our skin and walked upon the earth. He came sharing the Gospel, a story of good news. That the sick would be healed. That the blind would be made to see. That the diseased would be cured. **And that though our selfishness and sinfulness had severed the relationship we were destined to have with God, Jesus would give us the opportunity to make that relationship right again.**

As Jesus reversed the death of Lazarus, we remember today that Jesus permanently defeated death in his own death and resurrection. And today, this very morning, he continues to invite us away from lives that lead only to death. He invites us out of our graves, telling us to **“come out.”**

I love the image of Lazarus standing outside of his own grave, carrying the stench of his death and still wrapped from head to toe in burial cloth. And Jesus simply says, **“take off the grave clothes and let him go.”**

When Jesus invites us into a life lived with him, he does not call us to get all cleaned up first. When we accept his invitation he takes us how we are and then helps us get cleaned up.

If you are sitting here this morning and it has been years since you really considered your relationship with God. Or maybe you only think about God every year about this time. Or maybe you are deeply marred in addiction or yourself or busyness or anger or resentment or hate or pain, whatever it is that is holding you in a tomb, God is not calling you to get rid of those things before you come to Him. He is

saying to you that if you come, he will do the miracle. If you believe, He will call you out of death. He will unbind you and set you free. He will give you new life.

It is important to realize though, that this faith will not make you physically immortal or even make everything in your life perfect. What it does bring about is that from this moment on we will no longer live under the power of death. No matter what happens to you, no matter what you are called to endure, no matter what pain and hardship you fight . . . Jesus has achieved a victory for you. You are deeply loved and you will spend eternity in paradise with God.

Do you believe this?

That is all that it takes. **Give up your ways. Give up your remedies.** Trust that Jesus is who he said he was. Trust that God loves you and wants a relationship with you. Trust that God is for you the resurrection and the life.

(show diagrams again)

God made you. God loves you. God hurts as you hurt. God wants to be deeply connected with you.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”

Resources Consulted:

Ridderbos, Herman. The Gospel of John. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.