

John 11:1-45

¹Now 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.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus Crist our Savior, amen.

The Gospel reading from John 11, which is the text for this sermon, is another one of the signs pointing us to understand Jesus is the true Messiah. In the Gospel of John we have 7 of these signs. In chapter 2 Jesus changed water into wine. In chapter 4 Jesus healed the official's son. In chapter 5 Jesus healed the paralytic. In chapter 6 Jesus fed 5000 people and walked on the water. In chapter 9 Jesus gives sight to the blind man. Now, in today's reading from chapter 11 Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

The purpose for each of these signs was not so people would say, "Ahh look at Jesus. He can turn my bathtub of water into wine." "Hey, let's go on a picnic with several thousand of our closest friends and just bring along 2 loaves of bread and 5 fishes. We'll see how this unbelievable chef can make food stretch. Let's invite him around to our next party." Please note these are not called miracles in John's Gospel. The signs have a purpose. All seven signs in John's Gospel are included so people would believe Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and the savior of the whole world. These signs are recorded in the Bible so *you* would believe Jesus is *your* savior. Unfortunately, in times like we're facing now, with such uncertainty many people seem to forget Jesus is still our savior and God is still in control of the universe. At times we're all a little like Martha in verse 21 when she says, ²¹ "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." As I reflect on

my own prayers, how often I've prayed things like... Lord give me this or that. Or make my life more comfortable. Make my life better. Take away this bad situation. When we pray for those same things for our family and friends or even strangers, we're only one step up from such greedy prayers. During times when I feel anxiety my prayers usually beg God to help in some way like He helped those people in the Bible.

I'll confess, I get a bit anxious when Jesus does something like he does in today's Gospel text. When he heard Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for another 2 days. Jesus waited two days before going to see Lazarus... If a doctor did this today, you would probably want to sue them!!! When supplies of essential items run short or are delayed we tend to get more than anxious, We take matters into our own hands and sometimes act irrationally, like buying more toilet paper than we could possibly use in ten years, just because we don't know what else we can do. Think about how angry people were getting when the tests for the Corona virus were not available. Many fingers were pointing, and much blame was being bandied about. When life and death situations happen, we don't like procrastination or procrastinators.

How about you? Do you get a bit anxious with God when he doesn't seem to answer your prayers right away in the way you want them answered? Perhaps we're trying to force God to operate according to our timelines, rather than us

operating on God's divine time. Recently I heard it said, "The problem we have in dealing with God is that we have two standards. We expect God to be instant, fast and super quick in responding to us, yet we like to go about our week at our own pace, fitting God and in when it suits us." I pray that doesn't describe your relationship with God...

Maybe there's another way to approach God during times of suffering and pain. In addition to asking God to improve our situation, perhaps we could ask God to use our situation for His good. That's how God works. God certainly doesn't cause bad things like this Pandemic, but He certainly can and will cause good to come out of this and all other bad situations. I have no doubt the human race will come out of this Pandemic better and stronger than we were before because Jesus has got this. Jesus is still the creating and sustaining force holding all things together. One good thing that's already coming out of this pandemic crisis is we're sort of going back to the basics. We're doing things like washing our hands a lot more and cleaning and sanitizing doorknobs and other frequently touched surfaces. We're being told it's okay to stay home when you're sick. In fact, you should always stay home when you're sick. If these minor lifestyle changes become habits, my guess is deaths from all diseases will significantly decrease. Some good will come from this pandemic because God is good and God loves us enough to get involved in the lives of His people.

Another good thing coming from this pandemic is the increase in people turning to God in prayer and in their witnessing to their faith in public ways. My observation from seeing the things people post on social media leads me to believe the pandemic has indeed caused people to turn to God and Jesus more than ever. We saw the same thing happen after 911. God uses the situations we experience so that non-believers might see our of faith and trust in Jesus Christ in action. It's not just about non-believers hearing your stories of how your faith has sustained you during hard times, it changes the hearts of many believers too. For many believers this pandemic with the threat of serious illness or even death causes us to turn to God in repentance and renew our relationship with our creator.

Today's Gospel reading about the raising of Jesus' friend, Lazarus, is a sign pointing to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent to save the world. I'd like you to think about how God uses the experiences in our lives. Each day this week ask God to use the situations you are encountering, whether they be good, bad, or ordinary, so that others may experience the Messiah. So others may experience Jesus, and believe in Him!!!

Remember what Saint Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, ²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28) All things work together for good. That means even sickness and death. In many ways death is the biggest means God

uses to demonstrate his love for us. Death is one of the most difficult things we face. People have a real difficult time talking about it, let alone dealing with it. Here lately though, it's hard to avoid. Every time the news is on TV, we're constantly being shown the number of cases of Corona and the death toll. Our faces have been rubbed in the stats over how much sickness and death surround us. To be honest, I'm not sure how people with no faith in Jesus Christ can get through a day. Because of Jesus, despite the growing numbers we who trust in God's promises don't lose hope. We don't find ourselves in despair because we know death isn't the final word.

This story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead gives us a foretaste of what will soon happen to Jesus. Like Lazarus, Jesus will lay in a stone-cold tomb. However, unlike Lazarus, Jesus was raised to eternal life. Lazarus was given more time to be with his family and friends, but he still faced the inevitable certainty of the grave. When God raised Jesus, the chains of death were broken once and for all. We are given the promise that even though we die, we will rise again to be with Jesus for all eternity. Jesus gives us a way to grieve in a different way. With Him there is hope and a promise that death is not the end. Listen again to the words of your savior, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." This is what Jesus is constantly doing for you every day. When you read scripture, participate in a

Bible study, pray, or even just listen to Christian songs, Jesus is saying to you, “I will lead you to a better place.” Jesus wants you present with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s a place that’s out of this world. It’s a place for real living. This world is a place for the dying. From the day we’re born we’re dying. Jesus doesn’t want us to be stuck here. He wants to take us to the place of the living.

Because of Jesus death and resurrection, our outlook on life isn’t limited to one that ends when we die. Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection point us to a future not dominated by wars, death, ecological disasters, increasing poverty and pandemics. Because of Jesus The Kingdom of God becomes reality for us. The place where nothing perishes, spoils or fades.

In raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus brought joy back into the lives of Mary and Martha. May Jesus also bring joy to your life as you experience God’s hand leading and guiding you through the perils of this world. May God bring good out of these troubling times, so His glory is made known to all people.

Amen.