

John 11.1-46 Sermon / COB / 10.12.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Good morning! If you did not bring a Bible, you can grab one off the window sills. If you have a Bible, you should turn to John 11.

- † While you are turning, think about this, what's the most miraculous thing you have ever seen?
 - I remember many of us praying for someone's uncle who had a bad form of cancer, and when they went to operate it had disappeared. One time I was almost in an accident, and when I got out of the car I could not figure out how I had both evaded the car trying to hit me and missed the pole sticking up from the median now right behind my car. I am pretty sure God helped me there. I think it is a miracle how God has changed and grown me over the past seventeen years.
 - Most people in America don't believe in miracles anymore. I wonder if that is why we don't experience them more often. Churches in the third world report far more miracles than churches in America. Maybe God is working differently over there; maybe he is waiting for us to believe in what is possible!

- † If you had lived in Jesus' day, what miracle could he have done to best convince you that he was who he said he was? What would be his most impressive miracle?
 - I want to read you a story today. It's a story that ends with an amazing miracle, a miracle that is both a sign identifying Jesus from Old Testament prophecy and a sign that Jesus in the future can keep the promises he made to his disciples, including us.

[Slide 2: 11.1-2] John 11.1-2 NASB: **Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord [Jesus] with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.**

- † This gives the setting for our scene. This is the first mention of this family by our author John. The hair wiping scene is yet to come in his narrative, even though John alluded to it here. It must have been a well-known story by the time he wrote.

[Slide 3: 11.3-6] John 11.3-6: **So the sisters sent word to Him [Jesus], saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He [Jesus] heard that he [Lazarus] was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.**

- † **[Slide 4: Sir]** All the characters in our story were speaking in Aramaic, a regional language similar to Hebrew. John translated this conversation into Greek when he wrote his gospel. I expect Martha and Mary called Jesus "Rabbi" most of the time, as a polite form of address. When John wrote in Greek, he used the word κύριος, which could be mean "Lord," "Master," or "Sir." Probably, Mary and Martha would have been calling Jesus "Sir," to show him respect as their mentor and teacher, but most English translations use "Lord," so we'll go with that.

- † **[Slide 5: Love]** More importantly, we see here that Jesus had personal friendships, there were people he loved. John does not invest much time in showing us personal relationships in his gospel, but we can see that Jesus had some in this scene. He knew this family intimately, as friends, and he loved them as friends. We should find comfort in knowing that Jesus really cares about individuals.
- † **[Slide 6: connections]** Jesus already knows what is going to happen, and that the result will not be death, but glory for both God the Father and himself as the Son of God.
- The Greek text makes clear that *because* of his love for the family and to bring about the result of his glory, Jesus responded to news of Lazarus' sickness by *remaining* where he was.
 - When we read the story in English, it can seem like Jesus is a bit callous or uncaring, to just hang out where he was instead of rushing to heal Lazarus, but the text says his decision was motivated in part by his love for his friends! This is because he knows *they* will benefit from what is going to happen to bring him glory.

[Slide 7: 11.7-8] John 11.7-8: Then after this He [Jesus] said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and are You going there again?"

- † As we will see momentarily, the village of Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, just on the other side of the Mount of Olives, in the region of Judea. Jesus and his disciples had fled this area not long ago, because the religious leaders in Jerusalem were plotting to kill him.
- As we have discussed before, John uses the term "Jews" to mean various things in his gospel, including "Jewish people," "Judean people," and "Jewish religious leaders" as he means here.
 - The disciples were not too wild about the idea of traveling back into the danger zone, as you can imagine. The tension among the religious leaders has been growing for some time, and they now appear quite determined to have Jesus killed. In fact, the last time they were in Jerusalem, the religious leaders actually picked up stones to throw at Jesus.

[Slide 8: 11.9-10] John 11.9-10: Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

- † Without accurate watches or clocks, the custom for the Romans and the Jews was to divide the daylight into twelve hours which would vary in length with the change in seasons. People, of course, worked during daylight.
- What Jesus is saying here follows up a teaching he gave his disciples in John 9.4-5, that they must do the work of God the Father while he, the light of the world, was with them, for when he died it would be a time of spiritual darkness and much more difficult to carry out their mission.

[Slide 9: 11.11-16] John 11.11-16: This He [Jesus] said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."

† **[Slide 10: growing faith]** Jesus knew that the miracle he was about to do would bless Lazarus' family and strengthen their faith. Here we see that he knew the same would be true for the disciples who were with him. Jesus was glad he was not there to heal Lazarus, because the way God the Father has set it up to play out will result in maximum glory to the Father and Jesus, and thus maximum impact on those with Jesus in that moment. Some who do not believe yet will believe and those who already believe will grow in faith.

- Now, Lazarus has died as a young man. We have had deaths in some of our families recently. You can imagine how his sisters felt. As we will see, many people were mourning this death. And the disciples with Jesus are about to be put in harm's way as they travel to the grave. Yet Jesus sees that this will all be to their benefit. What does that tell you about the potential for your times of suffering? Should we maybe change our perspective on suffering, to understand that sometimes it is necessary for our long-term benefit? How should that change our thinking when we are going through hard times?
- I think this clearly shows that Jesus and thus God the Father are more interested in our long-term spiritual health than they are in our happiness. Should that change our focus in life? Should it change our priorities and valuations of activities we could pursue? Should it change how we interpret what God puts us through in life? If you do the devotion this week, you will have an opportunity to reflect on these questions at more length.

† **[Slide 11: Thomas]** The movie shows Thomas enthusiastic to go die with Jesus. I think that is an exaggeration. I have always taken this more as sarcasm, though I now think maybe that was an exaggeration in the other direction, reflecting my own personality flaws.

- We all remember Thomas for doubting Jesus' resurrection, but here he shows clear faith in Jesus as God's anointed Messiah, and is courageously willing to follow Jesus even to his own death. No doubt he was frightened, but he believed in Jesus and the promises of scripture about the final resurrection, which we will discuss in a moment.
- Why are missionaries willing to risk their lives for the gospel mission? Because if we believe in who Jesus is and in what he has promised, then we are not afraid to die.

[Slide 12: 11.17-19] John 11.17-19: **So when Jesus came, He found that he [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.**

- † We know from John 10, that Jesus and his disciples had gone from Jerusalem and across the Jordan River. If Jesus left where he was when God the Father told him Lazarus was dead, then it took four days to get to Bethany, indicating they traveled a long way.
- I think Jesus waited to set out for Bethany until Lazarus was dead for a couple of reasons. First, I expect he wanted it to be clear he was not rushing to heal Lazarus but arrived too late. Second, I think he *wanted* to arrive exactly *four* days after Lazarus was dead.
 - One reason for this was that decomposition would be obvious by that time, so there would be no question of whether Lazarus was really dead. Another possibly was that some religious leaders taught that the soul hovered over the body for three days and then left on the fourth. We know this belief existed a couple of centuries later, and it is possible it existed then. So again, by waiting until the fourth day, it would be obvious that Lazarus was beyond healing.

† The author John tells us that Bethany was close to Jerusalem and then that many Judeans or Jews had come to console the sisters. By this he indicates that this was a prominent family with many connections in the capital, and that when Jesus and his disciples arrive, they find a large crowd mourning Lazarus' death, not just the close family.

[Slide 13: 11.20-22] John 11.20-22: Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

† The Greek word οὖν can mean "therefore" or it can mean "then." Sometimes it helps to keep that in mind if a "therefore" seems out of place.

† Some scholars see Martha's comment as a polite rebuke, that she is implying Jesus should have been there to heal her brother; after all they had sent for him. Other scholars see it as a statement of grief and faith in what Jesus could have done.

- **[Slide 14: faith]** When she says "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You," she is not asking for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. That will become evident as we go on, and see her reactions to things Jesus says and does.
- Her words here are an expression of continued confidence in Jesus despite her grief over her brother's death. She is mourning the untimely death of her brother, and Jesus had not been there to save him, but she still keeps her faith in Jesus. I think that is a good example to follow when we are suffering. We might not understand why, we might not think it is fair, we might be miserable, but that should not shake our faith in Jesus.

[Slide 15: 11.23-27] John 11.23-27: Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."

† When Jesus promised Lazarus would rise from the dead, Martha naturally thought he was referring to the end of time, when God will resurrect the faithful to new life on a new earth. Belief in this final resurrection was wide-spread among Jews in Jesus' day, especially because the Pharisees taught it in the local synagogues.

† **[Slide 16: claim 1]** But then Jesus deviated from the teaching of the other Rabbis and reiterated one of his own unique claims: that he was the one who would resurrect the faithful!

- One thing Jesus said was that anyone believing in him – even if s/he should physically die – would live [or we might translate, "come back to life"]. This is the promise of resurrection of the faithful to new physical life on a new Earth at the end of time. This is the promise Martha already said she believed, but here Jesus makes it clear that resurrection to new physical life on the new earth depends on faith in him. If you believe in Jesus, even though you will physically die, you will be resurrected back to physical life on the new earth at the end of time.
- **[Slide 17: claim 2]** Another thing Jesus said was that everyone who presently is spiritually living and believing in him certainly will not spiritually die ever. These are present tense participles,

emphasizing that they are experiential and ongoing. To be spiritually living is to have had an internal change from spiritual death to spiritual life caused in grace by God; to be believing is the outward change we make in response to this grace we receive. Jesus said those who are experiencing spiritual life and faith in him will never spiritually die. We discussed this a couple of weeks ago, in John 10: if you are born again, saved in Christ, you have true spiritual life right now, and that is forever and can never be lost or taken away.

- † **[Slide 18: claim 3]** A third thing Jesus said, in summary, was that he is the resurrection and the life, that he is the only source of these two blessings. If you want true spiritual life that lasts eternally, you have to have faith in Jesus. He is the only gate, the only way to salvation and provision, the only way to reconcile with God the Father. Jesus wanted to know if Martha believed not only that Lazarus would be resurrected, but that Jesus alone could resurrect him.
- **[Slide 19: Martha]** Martha used a perfect tense verb, saying, “I *have believed* that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” The Greek perfect tense can emphasize that something has already happened, but it also emphasizes ongoing results of what happened. Martha has believed in Jesus as the Christ/Messiah, as the Son of God, as the one prophesied to come into the world from God as the savior, and this faith has lasting results, in that her faith is not shaken by her grief.
 - It is significant that Martha connects Jesus’ identity with his ability. She can believe in his power to resurrect the dead because she knows he is the Son of God and Messiah-savior. It is the same for us. If we believe in who Jesus is, then we can believe in what he did while walking the earth and in what he promises to do for us. That’s why John wrote this gospel to convince us that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah-savior.

[Slide 20: 11.28-31] John 11.28-31: **When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she [Mary] heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.**

- † So now Mary will talk with Jesus, but she will not have the privacy that Martha had and that Martha had hoped she could have.

[Slide 21: 11.32-34] John 11.32-34: **Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.”**

- † **[Slide 22: ἐμβριμάομαι]** Mary expressed almost the same words as Martha. But more important is what is happening in Jesus. When Jesus observed Mary and her friends weeping before him, he was “deeply moved in spirit and himself unsettled emotionally.”
- Some scholars take the first verb, ἐμβριμάομαι, to mean Jesus was outraged, while others take it to mean he was deeply moved or saddened. Looking at historical uses of the verb, when it described an action toward someone else, it revealed anger, like you were rebuking or censuring

someone. But when it described a state of being, it meant you were deeply moved. It was common for Greek and Hebrew verbs to have different meanings for different contexts.

- The second verb, *ταράσσω*, is the same one John used to describe how Jesus felt about being betrayed by Judas [13.21] and facing his death to come [12.27].
- What so disturbed Jesus that John used these two verbs? Perhaps it was the pressing reality of the work of evil, visible in death and grief; perhaps it was seeing actions that went past grief to despair, indicating a lack of confidence in God's scriptural promise of resurrection. It was Jewish custom for even the poor to hire two flute players and a professional wailing woman to lead the time of grieving, and this family was more prominent, so there would have been a lot of loud weeping going on, and maybe Jesus thought it was excessive and offensive by indicating despair.

[Slide 23: 11.35-38] John 11.35-38: Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?" So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

- † The shortest verse in the Bible, right? Jesus wept. John uses a different verb here than he used for the others weeping. The others were crying out in loud lament because of their grief – or because they had been paid to cry – but Jesus quietly shed tears.
 - Jesus was aggrieved by the evidence of sin – whether that evidence was death as the cause of grief or it was excessive grief indicating despair and a lack of faith – but Jesus also had compassion for the people involved; he grieves for their sorrow at the effects of sin and for their suffering in sin.
 - Jesus would not be weeping out of his own grief for Lazarus, because he knows the miracle that is coming, but he was deeply moved in spirit again.

[Slide 24: 11.39-40] John 11.39-40: Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

- † Many Jewish graves were carved out of the rock. This one was like a cave, with a stone in front to keep the animals out.
- † We see here that Martha did not expect Jesus to do anything for Lazarus right now. She knows Lazarus is dead and decomposing, and thinks that is the end of the story until the last day when all the faithful will rise. Her concern now is offending the mourners with the stench of decomposition.
 - Jesus' response to her either reflects a part of the conversation not recorded by John or summarizes what we did read earlier, in that resurrection to new life would be a revelation of God, a manifestation of his glory.

[Slide 25: 11.41-46] John 11.41-46: So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what

He had done, believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.

- † The dead responded to Jesus' voice! How awesome is that?!
 - Lazarus had been wrapped in aromatic spices, as Jesus would be at his death. They would have laid him on a sheet that was twice his length and wide enough to wrap around him once, with his feet at one end, then folded the sheet over his head down to his feet, then wrapped other clothes around his ankles and bound his arms to his body, and wrapped around his face a sweat-cloth that was worn on the shoulders by laborers, like a towel. A person bound like this would not be able to walk, but could shuffle and hop.
 - Jesus cried out in a loud *harsh* voice, the kind of voice that would terrify, such that even the dead must respond. And Lazarus did respond. Granted life by God, he hopped out of the grave.

- † Jesus knew all along that he would do this miracle. His prayer shows he had already worked it out with God the Father long ago.
 - So he knew that Lazarus' illness would not result in lasting death, and he knew that the situation, as sad as it was for the sisters and as dangerous as it was for the other disciples, would result in benefit to them, because the miracle would restore the dead man to life and thus build everyone's faith in who Jesus was and what he could do.
 - **[Slide 26: sign backward]** Martha believed Jesus was the Christ and Son of God who was to come into the world from God the Father. The miracle was a sign that pointed backward to help identify Jesus, being tied to the prophecies of Daniel. Daniel predicted the captivity of Israel under four Gentile nations, until God's kingdom would come about through the work of the Son of Man, who would be killed by the fourth nation yet would rule Israel and conquer all the Gentile nations. Daniel also predicted God's faithful people rising to everlasting life. By raising Lazarus, Jesus identified himself as the prophesied Son of Man through whom God the Father would resurrect the dead, end pagan Gentile rule, and establish his kingdom on the new Earth.
 - **[Slide 27: sign forward]** It also was a sign that pointed forward to Jesus' promise to resurrect all the faithful. If he could resurrect Lazarus right then while walking the earth as a man, of course he would be able to resurrect the faithful at the end of time, when he returned in his full glory as the Son of God and prophetic Son of Man who would rule in God the Father's name. And so his promise of true spiritual life now which would last forever was more plausible, given this display of power resulting in life.

Conclusion

- † Jesus is the resurrection and the life. If you believe in him, you will have true spiritual life right now which will never end, even though you will physically die, and he will resurrect you to new physical life on a new earth at the end of time.
 - Jesus already has said that he is the gate, the way to salvation and provision. In a little while, he will say that he is the way and the truth and the life, and nobody comes to the Father except through him. Jesus is the only way. If you want to know more about that, come talk to me. Let's pray...