

John 11:1-45

The name Lazarus means *God is my helper*. Yet, as we read the narrative before us, it appears as though he is incorrectly named. For instead of coming to help when Lazarus is ill, Jesus stays put where He is and lets him die. Mary and Martha are praying. They send for Jesus to come. But their prayers seem to do the exact opposite of that which they are wanting. Jesus makes certain that the illness takes Lazarus in death before He even begins His journey.

This seems so unlike God, doesn't it? To put Mary and Martha through such grief! After four days, their brother's body is starting to decay. Their hope is gone. Perhaps we are thinking that if we were God, we would not allow this.

How good, therefore, that we are not! Not only would we have prevented the death of Lazarus, we would have stopped the coronavirus from spreading. But how short-sighted we are. Lazarus must die so that through his death Jesus is glorified. Don't you think, also, that God has a grand purpose, one that is merciful, in not preventing this horrific pandemic?

Mary and Martha are as short-sighted as us. "*Lord,*" they both cry, "*if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*" They have faith. They believe that God gives Jesus the power to heal; to keep death from coming, at least for a while.

But Jesus can do so much more. He is so much more. "*I am the Resurrection and the Life,*" He tells Martha; "*Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.*"

We confess these words when our loved ones die. We believe them. But do we fully understand them? Like Martha, we say, "*I know my (loved one) will rise again in the resurrection on the Last Day.*" And yes, her brother would so rise. But she does not grasp at all his resurrection to life here and now. Martha is not paying attention to the verb Jesus is speaking. It's not, "*I will be the Resurrection and the Life,*" but rather, "*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*" She doesn't get it. Until Jesus stands before the tomb of Lazarus and calls forth, and the man who was dead four days, his flesh beginning to rot, comes out alive for all to see.

Why doesn't Jesus do this for us today? Mary and Martha were surely overjoyed to have their brother back with them. We're missing out on such joy as that. Or are we? We're drawing the wrong comparison here. We're comparing the death and resurrection of Lazarus to when our loved ones die and are buried, and we believe that their resurrection will take place not here and now, but on the Last Day.

Now this we should believe. This is the teaching of Scripture. This is our confidence and hope. But, like Martha, are we also changing Jesus' words to say, "*I will be, on the Last Day, the Resurrection and the Life*"?

Rather than viewing our death, burial, and resurrection on the Last Day in the light of the Lazarus narrative, we should view our baptism in this light. For in baptism, as Romans 6 clearly teaches, we die, are buried, and rise again – the same thing that happens here to Lazarus.

What takes place here in John 11 is pointing to what will take place, just days away, when Jesus will die on the cross, be buried, and be raised to life. And this is what our baptism means to us. For we die with Christ, says the apostle, we are buried with Him, and we are raised to life with Him. As Jesus raised Lazarus to life, so has He raised you to life in your baptism. When parents bring their children to Jesus in baptism, they can rejoice just as Mary and Martha were rejoicing when Lazarus was raised to life.

Our baptism truly is a resurrection. And listen to what Jesus says about it. "*Everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.*" We live in Jesus because in baptism He gives His life to us. We believe in Him because in baptism He works this faith in our heart. And living and believing in Jesus, we shall never die. This word *never* in the original Greek means that it is not even possible to die. Why not? Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, and our baptism places us into Him now and forever.

And yet, people are dying, aren't they? The coronavirus is claiming many in death. Our loved ones die. We know that we, too, will die. But this death we need not fear. This death is but a sleep from which we will awaken. "*Lazarus has fallen asleep,*" Jesus tells His disciples. We can fear the grave as little as we fear our bed.

Whether you are awake or asleep, you belong to Jesus. Your place is with Him and in Him. The greatest miracle in your life is not the one that will take place when your body is raised on the Last Day, but the one that has already taken place in your baptism. On the Last Day, Jesus will awaken you from the sleep of death, but in your baptism, He raised you to life with Him. And this resurrection guarantees that you will rise from sleep in the end.

As we live these days pretty much in isolation from each other, the Lazarus narrative is very comforting. Jesus has complete power over death and the grace. Not only this, He has power over everything that is against you. Including the coronavirus. Including your sins and guilt. A lot of people are all wrapped up in fear right now. Not just fear of the virus and dying from it. Fear of facing God when death comes.

Take comfort. Look at what Jesus does for Lazarus. He commands that his burial cloths that were binding him be completely removed. In the same way Jesus gives this command for you. He forgives each and every one of you. Whatever guilt has been binding you, He removes it from you. In whatever way sin has been mastering you, Jesus releases you from your sin. He does this for you, He has this power, because He allowed your sin and guilt to bind Him on the cross. It claimed Him, so it cannot claim you. Rather, Jesus who is the Resurrection and the Life, claims you for His own. Amen.