

## **Gospel Presentation and reflection on John 11 (based on EasyEnglish Bible EASY)**

### **John 11: 1-7, 17-44 (mostly from EasyEnglish Bible EASY)**

**>>Scene 1: Pulpit: Narrator; Seated together: Martha and Mary; Messenger running; Lazarus lying on the ground curled up under a blanket.**

**Narrator:** There was a certain man, who was called Lazarus. He lived at Bethany, the village where his sisters Mary and Martha lived, too. He got sick. FYI, this sister Mary was the same Mary who had poured oil with a nice smell over the feet of the Lord Jesus. Then she had cleaned his feet with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus:

**Martha:** Here, take this message to Jesus. Tell him that his friend Lazarus is sick. Ask him to come and help heal Lazarus.

*(messenger runs from Martha to Jesus)*

**Narrator:** Jesus got the message. Then he said,

**Jesus:** Tell Mary and Martha that ‘This illness will not end with Lazarus’s death. No, its purpose is to show how great God is. Because of this, people will see how great God’s Son is.’

**Narrator:** Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and their brother Lazarus, too. He heard the news that Lazarus was very sick. But then he stayed in the place where he was for two more days.

### ***Reflection, Part 1***

1. We often think of Jesus always working, always doing something
  - a. He is always teaching, or in conversation
  - b. He is always healing or traveling or eating
  - c. He is always surrounded by people: followers, those seeking healing, those who were his friends
2. But in this story he does something which we seldom see: Jesus stalls
  - a. When he gets the news about his friend Lazarus he doesn’t spring into action
  - b. The Gospel only tells us that Jesus waited. We don’t know what he did in that waiting period
  - c. Two things are worrisome here:
    - i. Jesus was truly worried about his friends, but he decides to stay put.

1. He could have done something about the illness that Lazarus had right when he got the message. After all, there are other stories where Jesus heals someone from a distance, without even visiting them
  - ii. Secondly, Jesus anticipates that Lazarus would actually die.
- d. We can feel the tension in the passage, with the sisters worried and sending a panicked message to Jesus, their brother Lazarus very ill, yet Jesus holding back for reasons we can't understand.
- e. The passage hits in the gut for any of us who have asked God for help, and we felt that God stalled, not coming to our aid right when we were in deep trouble
  - i. Mary and Martha were busy caring for their brother, trusting their dear friend Jesus would do right by them.
  - ii. But he just wasn't getting there. Should they send another message and tell Jesus to hurry up?
  - iii. As they nursed Lazarus and waited for Jesus to arrive, the thing they feared happened. Lazarus died.

**>>Scene 2: Narrator-pulpit; Martha and Jesus seated together, Lazarus offstage;**

**Narrator:** Jesus did eventually travel to the town of Bethany, knowing that Lazarus would die before he and his disciples got there. When Jesus got to Bethany he discovered that Lazarus had already been in the grave for four days. Bethany was about 2 miles from Jerusalem. Many Jews had come there to visit Martha and Mary. They wanted to help Martha and Mary because their brother had died.

Martha heard the news that Jesus was coming. So she went out to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house with the visitors.

**Martha:** 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died. But even now, I know that God will answer you. God will do whatever you ask.'

**Jesus:** Jesus told her, 'Your brother will rise and become alive again.'

**Martha:** 'I know that he will rise on the last day, to become alive again.'

**Jesus:** I AM the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live. Even if that person dies, they will continue to live. People who believe in me while they are alive will never die.

***Hymn – I am the Resurrection***

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**>>Scene 3: Narrator-pulpit, Martha, Jesus, Lazarus (carried to spot?) on the floor in front of them with blanket over top.**

**Jesus:** Martha, do you believe I am the resurrection and the life?’

**Martha:** ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah. You are God's Son, the one that God promised to send into the world.’

**Narrator:** When Jesus met up with Mary and others who were sad about Lazarus’ death, he saw that they were all crying. Jesus cried, too. And the people noticed how upset Jesus was. They wondered why he hadn’t just come sooner and healed Lazarus, to prevent all this sadness and suffering.

**Jesus:** Show me where you’ve put my friend’s body.

**Narrator:** And so they all went to the tomb where Lazarus was buried.

**Narrator:** Jesus arrived at the grave where they had put Lazarus's dead body. It was a cave. A large stone covered the front of the hole.

**Jesus:** ‘Take the stone away.’

**Martha:** ‘But Lord, by now his dead body will have a bad smell. He has been dead for four days!’

**Jesus:** ‘I told you already that you must believe in me. Then you will see how great and how powerful God is.’ So they moved the stone away. Jesus looked up towards the sky. He said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have listened to me. I know that you listen to me always. But I said this to help all the people who are standing here. I want them to believe that you sent me.’ .....(pause) ‘Lazarus, come out!’

**Narrator:** The dead man came out. There were pieces of cloth round his hands and round his feet. Another piece of cloth was round his face.

**Jesus:** , ‘Undo the cloths and let him go.’

**Narrator:** From that point on, many people began to recognize that Jesus was more than a holy man; he could give life to everyone! But some were afraid of this great power of Jesus, they began to plot how to murder Jesus.

## **Reflection, Part 2**

1. What a rollercoaster of emotions for Mary and Martha!
  - a. They had the concern for their brother
  - b. The hopeful anticipation of Jesus arriving
  - c. The pain of losing Lazarus
  - d. Maybe some resentment that Jesus had come too late
  - e. The trust in Jesus and that in the end God will give us eternal life
  - f. The shock of Jesus ordering their brother's tomb opened
  - g. The overwhelming joy of seeing Lazarus come back to life
2. And hopefully not lost in this is also the rollercoaster Jesus experienced
  - a. He was deeply sad about his friend dying
  - b. Yet Jesus trusted that God would let this miracle take place
3. This story is painful for Mary and Martha, even if in the end their brother is given back to them
  - a. Their world was crumbling around them, not only with Lazarus sick and then dead, but also with their trusted friend keeping them at arm's length
  - b. But we can hear their faith when they each said: if you had been here, our brother would never have died
  - c. The reassurance that Jesus gives them at that moment is one which we just sang about: Jesus is the resurrection and the life, those who believe in Jesus will never die.
  - d. Not the physical death (because even Lazarus would eventually die, again), but Jesus is trying to give a good news message beyond what we can all see or imagine
  - e. God gives us life in a way that physical life can only begin to show.
  - f. We may wrap our heads around it by thinking of heaven, of a place where after our life on earth ends we continue to be in God's presence
  - g. We may wrap our heads around it by acknowledging how present the memory of our loved ones is even years after they have died
  - h. And actually, we also may consider how God brings life to us in moments which feel very much like death, like we're stuck in a tomb, wrapped by harsh realities which keep us from being fully who God created us to be
    - i. We may be trapped by debilitating illness
    - ii. Or a work environment that is getting more and more toxic
    - iii. Or family drama which paralyzes us
    - iv. Or the panic of knowing we are on the knife's edge, one small crisis away from losing our apartment, or our health insurance, or our safety

- i. And yet somehow as we acknowledge that scary place where we may find ourselves, God offers us a way out, maybe not the way out we had hoped for, but a way out which affirms life, and hope and faith.
- j. Believing that Jesus is the resurrection and the life isn't just about stalling and waiting for that moment in the next life, in heaven.
- k. Believing it means gathering the courage of Jesus and asking God for life and asking all of us to help roll those heavy stones back – for our friends, for our family, for our unhoused neighbor, for ourselves.
- l. It took probably a couple of people to put a shoulder to that stone and roll it back.
- m. You and I get to put our shoulder to the stone and push, with the faith that God's resurrection and life will show up in a way we had never really anticipated.
- n. And with the emotional tomb open, we wait for God to surprise us with life.

Reflection questions:

1. Think of a time when you've felt trapped by life circumstances. Think of how God used people around you to help you out.
2. In the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11), why would Jesus wait to go heal Lazarus? If you were Mary or Martha, how would you feel about the whole episode (including Lazarus dying but then being brought back to life)?
3. How is God asking you to help bring someone out of a type of tomb, of circumstances which are holding them captive?