

## March 10: John 11

Vs. 1-16, The story of Mary anointing Jesus doesn't take place until chapter 12, but John wants to make clear that "that famous Mary who did that wonderful thing" is the same Mary as the sister of Lazarus in this story. Referring to Jesus as "Lord" prior to the resurrection is uncommon in John's gospel. Bethany was a village just outside Jerusalem and it's presumed that Jesus often stayed with Lazarus' family whenever he was visiting Jerusalem. They seem perhaps to be Jesus' "home base" in Jerusalem, which explains the close and intimate friendship between Jesus and Lazarus. Because of the number of times Lazarus is referred to as "the one whom Jesus loves" some scholars believe that Lazarus is actually the unnamed "disciple whom Jesus loved" referred to only in John's gospel. The message the sisters send implies an urgent situation and an expectation that Jesus will come to the rescue to heal their brother (given how he heals all these other people with whom he has no preexisting relationship). Instead, Jesus allows Lazarus, his dear friend, to die of his illness so that God's glory can be revealed through the greatest sign Jesus ever performs –raising someone from the dead. Jesus chooses to act in God's time, rather than according to the expected human timetable. After two days, it's time for God's response to the sisters' plea. Jesus tells his disciples that they're going back to Judea (yes, back to the same region where they very nearly were just stoned). "Fallen asleep" was an early euphemism for death. Jesus tells them that they are blessed to be witnesses of what he's going to do for Lazarus (Jesus knows all along what God's plan is in this situation). Thomas –yes, unbelieving Thomas- is dramatic and sarcastic (sure, let's go and get ourselves killed too trying to save Lazarus).

Vs. 17-44, Jewish mourning practices were elaborate. Lazarus must have been dearly loved and respected by many for so many to come and mourn him. Even with such respect, Mary and Martha faced an uncertain future, which could even result in them being forced into prostitution to support themselves. These unmarried sisters seem to have lost their only male sponsor in society. They are mourning for the loss of their brother, but also the loss of their freedom and respectable place in society. The immediate family of the deceased was expected to remain in the home for 1 week following the death –only going out to mourn at the tomb. Thus, Martha must have left undetected by the other mourners to go and meet Jesus on the road. Jewish tradition stated that the spirit remained around the body for 3 days, and resuscitation was possible during that time, but after 3 days, the spirit returned to God and the person was completely 100% dead, with no possibility of revival. This is why Jesus waited, to show God's glory in a way that had never been revealed before! Martha confronts Jesus with her hurt that he did not come immediately and save her brother, but still professes faith in him and in his relationship with the Father. Martha expressed her traditional Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead at the final judgment (the day of the Lord), but Jesus promises that she will experience that resurrection and life through him in the here and now. Jesus' work in the world is resurrection and life, that's how we can identify God at work –wherever there is resurrection and life. Jesus promises eternal life in him, and Martha confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who can and will do all of these amazing things. Her mourning is turned to dancing it seems, so she goes to find her sister so that she also can experience this hope in Jesus. Mary kneels at Jesus' feet (a sign of respect and supplication). Jesus is "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved" another way of saying "moved with compassion." He loved Lazarus

too, he feels what they're feeling, because he's grieving too –even though he knows what he's about to do. Jesus grieves at the death of his friend, and he grieves with the sisters. I find that comforting, because Jesus grieves with us as well. At this point, there's no time to waste, he immediately asks to be taken to the tomb. Onlookers, lay on the guilt thick with “could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” In other words, healing Lazarus should have been child's play for Jesus compared to opening the eyes of a man born blind. Jesus again feels pangs of guilt and grief. Martha tries to discourage Jesus from opening the tomb, as Lazarus has already started to decompose. Jesus begins this final and greatest sign by praying to God, showing the onlookers that his power comes from God as a confirmation of Jesus' identity. At just the sound of Jesus' voice, Lazarus is raised and walks out of the tomb, still bound up like a corpse.

Vs. 45-57, As with every sign in John's gospel, the response is mixed. Overwhelmingly, those who witnessed Jesus' raising of Lazarus believed in him, but some went to the Jewish authorities and reported his unorthodox behavior. They called a meeting of the Sanhedrin –the highest Jewish authority- and decided that Jesus must die, no longer just for his crime of blasphemy, but in order to protect the whole Jewish nation and the temple from Roman reprisals. Rome would have been especially on the look out for would be Messiahs during Passover, as Passover is a Jewish freedom festival. Jesus could no longer move about openly. It's interesting that John sees Caiaphas as making a God-inspired prophesy that Jesus must die –not just for the nation, but also in order to gather together all the Jews in diaspora.