

SEVEN WORDS - YES
A SERMON BASED ON JOHN 11:17-27
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2019
10:00 a.m.

Lazarus, Martha and Mary,

were brother and sisters.

They were also some of Jesus' closest friends.

They had seen his work first hand.

They had witnessed some of Jesus' signs, the miracles.

They had heard his teaching.

They knew that Jesus was a special, special man.

Which is why when Lazarus fell very ill,

the sisters sent for Jesus.

They knew of his ability to perform miracles, to heal the sick.

It was just recently Jesus had performed the unheard of miracle,

of restoring the sight of a man who had been born blind.

So even though Martha and Mary were worried about their brother

who lay ill,

they felt good knowing they had Jesus as their friend.

When they sent for him, Jesus was out of town.

Their hometown of Bethany was very close to Jerusalem.

Jesus had had to leave the area where they lived.

Healing the man born blind had really agitated the Pharisees.

Jesus had become a what they considered a dangerous threat.

There were plans afoot to be permanently rid of him.

Jesus wanting a bit more time for his ministry,

got away from there, and left the area

to get away from the danger.

Messengers brought word concerning Lazarus.

He was ill, very ill.

Jesus was likely very aware that the sisters needed him quickly,

that Lazarus needed him quickly.

He was likely very aware that they were praying for a healing,

praying that Jesus would do for Lazarus

what they had seen him do for so many others.

While you would expect Jesus to go to his friend immediately,
he did just the opposite.

He waited another two days before going to Lazarus.

He stayed put. Did nothing.

He did just the opposite of what you would expect a concerned friend to do.

He stayed away.

Only two days later did he say to the disciples,

let's go back to Judea.

The disciples were worried.

They knew last time they had barely escaped being arrested and executed.

Jesus was taking them right into the danger again.

They said to him, "Rabbi, a short while the Jews tried to stone you,
and yet you are going back there?"

Jesus told them,

"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep.

I am going there to wake him up."

They thought it meant that the worst of the illness was over,

that Lazarus was resting and regaining his strength now.

It seemed a little curious that Jesus would want to wake him.

They hadn't understood him. Jesus was using a figure of speech.

So he told them plainly,

“Lazarus is dead.

And for your sake I am glad I was not there,

so that you may believe.

But let us go to him.”

Thomas, ever the pragmatist,

was sure they were all going to their deaths by returning to Judea.

Nevertheless said to the others,

“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Doubting Thomas was also a man of courage.

By the time they made it back to Bethany,

Lazarus had been dead four days.

Ancient rabbinic teaching held that one's soul

stayed nearby the body for three days.

That Lazarus had been dead four days is significant.

It is our cue that he was absolutely beyond resuscitating.

His soul was long gone.

Large groups of Mary and Martha's friends and family
were still at the house, keeping them company in their mourning,
offering their condolences, keeping the sisters comforted.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming,
she ran out to meet him. Mary stayed at home.

I find it an interesting picture.

It was Mary who sat at Jesus's feet listening to his teaching,
while Martha did all the work.

It was of Mary who Jesus said, 'She has chosen what is better'

But when anxiety and disappointment in Jesus came,

it was Martha who persisted, pushed through,

and went out to meet him anyway.

Their emotions must have been charged.

likely filled with grief at losing their brother,

likely filled with anger and disappointment

that Jesus hadn't come sooner,
likely wondering what could have been more important to Jesus,
than the life of his friend.

He had healed total strangers.

He had healed the centurion's boy without seeing him.

Yet for Lazarus, whom he loved,

it seemed Jesus had done nothing.

But Martha went out to meet him anyway.

When she came to Jesus the words spilled out of Martha's mouth.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

If you had been here.

They are words most of us have said at some point.

Jesus if you had been here.

The cancer wouldn't have won.

If you had been here,

I would still have a job.

If you had been here,

this wouldn't have happened.

I wouldn't be struggling like this.

If you had been here.

Where were you?

Where have you been?

But jumbled and mixed in with those words,

was faith.

Despite doubts, despite questions

Martha was a woman who went to Jesus anyway.

Martha was a woman who would trust Jesus,

no matter her doubts,

no matter her questions,

no matter the outcome.

Muddled in with her doubt and questions was faith.

She said to Jesus,

“But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha thought Jesus was looking ahead to a time in a heavenly future.

She wasn't thinking about what Jesus would do today.

She was thinking about what Jesus might do one day.

She said to Jesus,

“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

To which Jesus replied with his most dramatic I AM saying of them all.

“I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

Then Jesus asked Martha, “Do you believe this?”

And Martha, a woman, a woman who had been easily distracted

by many things in the kitchen,

a woman in the kitchen becomes the first person

to make a full confession of faith in the gospel of John.

“Martha, do you believe this?”

Yes.

“Yes Lord, I believe you are the Christ, the Messiah,

the Son of God who was to come into the world.”

Martha rushed back to get Mary.

“The teacher is here and asking for you.”

Well, Mary made a bit of a commotion in her hurry to get out of the house and to get to Jesus.

Everyone in the house noticed her hurrying,
and thinking she was going to the tomb to mourn,
they, being faithful, caring people, went with her.

When she reached Jesus,
Mary poured out her heart in the same way Martha had done.

Lord, if you had been here,
if you had been here,
my brother would not have died.

Where have you been Jesus?

Again, it is a question we will all have asked at some point.

She began to weep,
her friends and family who were with her began to weep.

And Jesus was deeply moved by the pain he saw.

He wept too.

Some in the crowd saw Jesus' tears, his love for Lazarus.

Others wondered where he had been.

If could heal a blind man, why wasn't he here to heal Lazarus?

If you had been here Jesus.

Jesus went to the tomb, a cave with a stone laid across the front.

Take away the stone, he said.

Martha was very upset by this,

the way we would be upset if someone told us to dig up

the grave of a loved one.

“Lord, you can't do that, by this time there will be an odour.

He has been in there four days.”

Jesus reminded her of their earlier conversation.

“Did I not tell you that if you believed,

you would see the glory of God?”

They took away the stone.

Jesus prayed for the benefit of the people gathered there.

That they would believe God sent him.

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me.”

Jesus then called out in a loud voice.

Lazarus come out.

Still wrapped in his burial clothes,
with cloth around his head, linens around his hands and feet.
Jesus said, take off the grave clothes and let him go.

Lazarus was alive and free.

For all the times I've read this passage, it still moves me.

I think it is because we get to experience the event,
through Martha's eyes.

It carries the questions we all ask at one time or another.

Jesus, why weren't you here?

If you had been here.

Jesus, if you could heal that blind person,

why didn't you heal when I needed you to?

Where were you when I needed the protection?

Why didn't you answer me when I called?

If you had been here Jesus, well...

Jesus, can I trust your judgment?

Jesus, can I trust you to do the right thing?

Do I believe this?

We get to experience a revelation about Jesus,

right along with Martha.

As we go through this passage,

it is natural for us to ask the questions Martha asked.

To express the concerns Martha expressed.

To voice our belief with Martha.

When Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

Martha thought he was speaking of the resurrection at the last day.

She thought he was speaking of a future event.

She thought he was speaking of a distant hope.

A future comfort, not a present one.

She expressed her faith,

that one day... one day...

I would venture to say we think of Jesus saying

I am the resurrection and the life

in much the same way Martha did,

as a future, not present, event.

Something that will happen one day.

But likely not today.

We speak of the resurrection and life with a distant hope.

As a future comfort. But not necessarily a present one.

We, with Martha express our faith as,

one day... one day...

Jesus corrected Martha in this matter.

She and Mary and the mourners with them,

probably Jesus' disciples too for that matter,

had been worried about Jesus providing healing,

they had wanted Jesus there to deter Lazarus' death.

Martha thought all she had left,

was the hope of a future resurrection.

Jesus corrected her.

I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.

Whoever lives in me, and believes in me will never die.

Jesus corrected her.

The resurrection, and life, is not a future event Martha.

The resurrection is a person, a person in the present.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

In one of his letters, John writes,

Whoever has the Son has life;

whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Jesus asks, do you believe this?

It is, in my opinion,

Jesus' most significant I am saying.

I am the resurrection.

If you have me, you live. Starting right now. Today.

Even though your death is coming,

if you live in me, and believe in me,

you never die. You live.

You really live.

Do you believe this?

With his own resurrection,

Jesus demonstrated beyond a doubt,

that all the things he had said about himself were true.

I am the bread, the light, the true vine.

I am the way, the truth, the life.

I am the gate, the good shepherd.

I am the resurrection and the life.

I am your eternal, victorious life.

I am life.

Resurrection and life is not just an event through a passage of time

Life is a person. The resurrection is a person, Jesus Christ.

If you have the person, if you have Jesus, you have life.

Martha went out to meet Jesus.

If you have Jesus Christ, you have the resurrection and the life.

If he lives in you and you in him,

If you abide in him,

submit to him, follow him, pray with him,

confess your sin to him, worship him,

serve him.

If you have him, you live and are alive.

Right now.

Death will merely be a transition, a turnstile, not an end.

The Bible speaks very plainly about us being a new creation in Christ.

The old has gone, the new has come.

The Bible says quite plainly, that for the person living and believing
in Jesus, they are no longer of this world.

They are the resurrection. They are the life.

The Bible speaks of the people of the resurrection one day
being revealed.

It means they are already around.

The day they are revealed, you'll just get to see who they are.

The resurrection is not just an event.

It is a person. If you have the person,
you have the resurrection. You have life.

Martha said, 'Jesus if you had been here.'

Jesus corrected Martha.

She thought the resurrection was a future event.

Something she couldn't know in the present,
but instead would have to anticipate.

Jesus told her,

I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live,

even though they die;

and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Do you believe this?

Bringing Lazarus from the tomb,

bringing hope from hopelessness,

Jesus showed himself, revealed himself.

He revealed he is life.

He is the life that brings you out from whatever it is

that has you entombed.

Resurrection, life, is Jesus Christ.

If you have Jesus,

you have the resurrection, right now.

You have new life.

If you don't have Jesus, you can have him.

Give him your life. You'll be in his hands.

Pray to him, confess to him, submit to him.

He'll bring you out of the tomb to life.

Say yes to Jesus.

Say yes to Jesus and you will be free.

Free to leave your tomb, to leave the old life behind you,.

Free to leave fear, anger and pettiness,

bitterness, slander, lying, insecurity, inadequacy, false idols,

Free to leave a heart broken and dead

behind you,

because Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Jesus said

I am.

I am the resurrection and the life.

Come out of the tomb and live.

Martha said to Jesus.

I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God,

who is to come into the world.”

Yes Lord.

Yes.

Amen.