

Sermon March 25, 2023 John 11:1-45

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have any of you been brought to life after your heart stopped? If not us, then surely we know of someone who had this happen. Bringing people back to life isn't really that big of a deal anymore, is it? It happens everyday right here in Pittsburgh. The same was not true back in the land of Israel some 2000 years ago. It never happened. Sometimes people would seem dead but then wake up again – which was the purpose for what we call “wakes.” But no one ever brought anyone back from the other side. Until Jesus. Three miracles are recorded in the Bible where Jesus performed this wonder. Jairus' daughter had died and after the trip back to his house Jesus brought her back. The widow of the village of Nain's son died. Presumably the next day when they were carrying out to the grave sight Jesus stopped the procession and raised the man from death. But in John's account of Lazarus, the miracle wasn't performed after an hour or two of death. It didn't happen after maybe one day. Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. I read somewhere that after three days an inspector would come and verify the person was indeed dead. This procedure would have already been performed on Lazarus. He was surely dead, not just in some type of coma. Matter of fact, Jesus purposefully waited two days before he set out to help Lazarus after he got the news he was gravely ill. Jesus did this so he could really make his point when he brought Lazarus out of the tomb.

All these raisings were another fulfillment of the words of the prophets about the nature of the Messiah who was to come. Jesus recounts these prophecies to John the Baptist who was harboring doubts himself if Jesus was the real deal.

*Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.
Matthew 11:4*

Jesus did want this miracle to be widely known and publicized. Many times before he had commanded people he healed not to tell anyone what Jesus had done for them. As his time was drawing close, Jesus now wanted it known publicly what he was doing. Not only did he wait four days before raising Lazarus, Martha also was careful how she let Mary know that Jesus had arrived. This is something that is not picked up in some of our translations of the Bible.

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." John 11:28

It is thought that if Martha had openly announced that Jesus had arrived, many of the mourners who were against Jesus or had their doubts about him would have either not followed her or would have left. Since it happened this way they all thought she was going to Lazarus' tomb so they went out with her to where Jesus was. Now Jesus had as big an audience as the situation would provide. The miracle happened as recorded in this Gospel reading. It had its desired effects. One effect is recorded in verse 45.

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him. John 11:45

So far, so good. But you know by now so much of what Jesus was doing got loused up by those pesky Pharisees. This occasion is no different. While it says many believed in Jesus because of Lazarus' raising, the miracle also had the opposite effect. This is recorded just a tad later in the chapter.

So from that day on they [Pharisees] made plans to put him to death. John 11:53

All this sets the stage for Palm Sunday which is next week. Because of Lazarus, many believed, waved their palms, and welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as their Messiah king. However, the self-righteous, corrupt, law-

oriented elite made plans to kill the one who had come to give them life eternal.

Well all that was then. What about now? There is an old old teaching drawn from that day when Jesus went to Bethany to raise Lazarus. The teaching is about Mary and Martha. Remember them? Jesus was in this same house with Mary at his feet drinking in Jesus' every word while Martha was slaving away in the kitchen trying to get dinner on the table. Martha comes into the living room and practically scolds Jesus that he would send Mary back into the kitchen and give her a hand. Jesus said that Mary actually had it right and Martha, too, should keep it simple and bask in the presence of her Savior. The difference between the workaholicism of Martha and the wonder of Mary shows up again here today. Martha meets with Jesus, complains that if he hadn't taken his sweet time, Lazarus would have made it. There is some back-and-forth between Martha and Jesus, and some classic words were spoken, like Jesus being the resurrection and the life. Martha even confessed her faith that Jesus was the Son of God. But consider these words Martha spoke:

But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.
John 11:22

Hmm. You see how Martha still wasn't quite where she needed to be in her faith? Compare that with Mary's response.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
John 11:32

It says that Martha "met" with Jesus. On the other hand, Mary falls at his feet. Not only is Jesus the Son of God for Mary, he is also "Lord." She confesses her faith in the divinity of Jesus. He did not have to ask the Father for help with Lazarus. He was able to do the job himself. And then he did so. The difference here between Mary and Martha may seem like small potatoes, but it has been drawn out and taught since the early days of the

church and perhaps it has devotional value for us today as well. Hopefully so.

So who is Jesus for you? Is he a glorious messenger from God? Is he a worker of signs and wonders when your chips are down or you need a glimpse of heaven? Is he someone for you to take pride in? Or is he for you what he is for Mary? True God. True man. The fullness of God in human flesh. The Lord of life. Your Creator. Your Redeemer.

Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. His sheep know him and he knows them. They hear his voice. He calls them and leads them out. This is who Jesus is for Mary. He called Mary out of the house and into his presence. Then he led Lazarus back to life and out of the tomb. Jesus calls you today. He calls you every Sunday. He calls from his Word. He calls from the font. He calls from his altar. He calls us into his presence that we may be received by him, that we would be renewed in his grace, and that we would be given the words of eternal life. Hear his voice. Come to him. And live. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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