

Wait?! Wait.

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Lent 5: John 11:1-45  
March 22-23, 2026

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, <sup>6</sup> after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

<sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them." <sup>11</sup> After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." <sup>13</sup> Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. <sup>15</sup> For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." <sup>16</sup> Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." (text continues through verse 45)

*Waiting is challenging. Jesus waited to arrive. But He was praying and seeking God's will, knowing Lazarus would be alright. We are called to trust that God is at work, even as we wait for God to reveal what's next.*

(Sound of clock ticking with microphone) Have you ever had to wait? The room goes silent except for this sound...wait...

When the children ask how long, we say, "Two sleeps." Or we say, one more cartoon."

When adults ask, the answers are more complicated. “Only a few more minutes sir. The Dr will be right in.”

The mother of a serviceman waits anxiously for her son’s next text or phone call. 24 hours feels like a week.

Years have gone by. Literal years of praying and hoping and asking why. Nothing seems to change and we wonder where God is.

The sisters sent a 911 to Jesus! “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” This is Lazarus their brother and friend of Jesus. The message came but Jesus didn't even tell the disciples about it. No preparations for a journey. No return message to the sisters. Only radio silence.

At that point Jesus is east of the Jordan river in the region called Perea. Instead of getting up right away to leave He stays two more days. The Lord waits.

What is Jesus doing while He waits? Why doesn't He tell the disciples that Lazarus is sick and probably dying? What is His delay about? Why doesn't He act? Where are you God? Where are you? I don't understand, what's going on? Come and save me!

Ever done that one? Ever done the slippery slide into the empty canyonland of the “why's and what's and where are you's?” It's a deserted place with little comfort and only the echo of your voice off the canyon walls.

But it's entirely normal for us to go there. We pray for peace. We pray for healing. Or justice. Or for hunger to end. Or for your loved ones to get pregnant. Or the cancer to respond. Or whatever unresolved thing it is which lives in the depths of your heart.

The answers don't come. The solutions seem out of reach. The joy that seems to fill others' hearts is elusive to you. War continues. Hunger continues. Homelessness continues. Grief continues. Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick...

Then we go to the place where Martha and Mary went. They watched their sick brother Lazarus get even sicker. Then they watch him die. When Jesus finally does arrive, it's not the ‘why's' and the ‘where were you's.’ The logic becomes, ‘if only!’ “If only you had been here.”

“If only he had passed the exam.” “If only I hadn’t said what I did.” “If only God had heard my prayers.” “If only she hadn’t turned into the other lane.”

The ‘if only’ canyon is right next to the ‘why and what’ canyon. Rock solid walls that only echo our thoughts with no resolution. We can’t turn back time. We only have the present. Living in the now is the best place to plant our feet. Trusting God is God of both the past, present and the future.

Thus out of the blue, the Lord God says to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” Judea is on the West side of the Jordan river and it is the region where Bethany and Jerusalem are located. The disciples voice their apprehension knowing that the authorities in Jerusalem were trying to kill Jesus. And here is the first clue that this story about Lazarus is also about Jesus.

Jesus knows that like Lazarus, his own death is close. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead so that people will believe in Him. But it is also the tipping point for the religious authorities to make a plan about Jesus’ demise. In verse 48, right after our text ends, the Pharisees declare if they allow Jesus to go on performing these signs, then the Romans would come and take away the temple. The high priest declares that one man must die for the people. If Jesus heads to Bethany, a mere two miles from Jerusalem, what comes next?

Remember how Jesus often goes to deserted places to pray? He requires, even though He is fully God, Jesus requires time to be close to God. Time to recover from doing miracles. Time to seek God’s will. Time to rest. Time to pray and breathe and pray and breathe...

The text doesn’t specifically say it. And there is inherent danger about inserting something into scripture that isn’t there. But NT Wright makes a plausible argument which makes good sense to me. Those two days that Jesus doesn’t go to Bethany, could it be that He is praying?

Jesus knows if He raises Lazarus from the dead, the religious authorities will soon be coming for Him. Lazarus’ death and resuscitation is intricately entwined with Jesus’ own death. Could He be asking God what is His own next right step? Could He be dealing with His own soul?

The people will believe in Him for certain. This is one of the most incredible stories in the Bible! A man resuscitated from the dead! Alive again! Simply astounding! Yet the natural consequence is Jesus’ own eventual arrest and death.

You and I live with unanswered prayers each day. But what I want you to take from this sermon is that when we are waiting, God is still at work! God sees the big picture when you and I can only see what is right in front of us.

Jesus and God were likely having a conversation about the moment Jesus would open that tomb! They were talking about how Lazarus wouldn't be stinky. God the Father was comforting Jesus' soul and giving Him courage to take the next step.

God's timing isn't ours. Remember that we live by chronos time...tick, tock, tick, tock. God lives by Kairos time. The moment that will be exactly right for divine intervention. The time that is best for us even if we cannot understand. Even if the moment ends in disappointment or death or not what we desire...God's timing is best.

Waiting is about living with faith, yes? When our plans or hopes fall apart, that's when faith becomes real. We keep trusting even though we have no power to change the outcome. Listen to Martha. Listen to her words!

"If you had been here (my brother would not have died). BUT even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

I know God will do whatever you say, Jesus! That's faith. That's trust...even though she is remembering sitting by Lazarus bed as he took his last breath. I know God will!

Martha's response changes from 'if only' to 'if Jesus'.<sup>i</sup> If Jesus is Messiah, then I can still trust in Him. If Jesus is resurrection, then there is life after death for my loved one. If Jesus is love then there is forgiveness. If Jesus is God then I can believe even though I don't have answers.

That's living on holy ground! And it became holy ground when the tomb was opened and Lazarus walked out. "I know God will do great things!"

**People of God, wait with God. God is with us. God is still at work. Amen!**

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<sup>i</sup> N.T. Wright. John for Everyone; Part 2. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY. 2004. Pg 7.