

**Fifth Sunday in Lent**  
March 29, 2020  
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**John 11:17-27,38-45** On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. **18** Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, **19** and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. **20** When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

**21** “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. **22** But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

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

**24** Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

**25** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; **26** and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

**27** “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

**38** Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. **39** “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

**40** Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

**41** So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. **42** I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

**43** When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” **44** The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

**45** Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

**“Shelter In the Resurrection and Life”**

Does this [grimacing face emoji] capture your current mood? Are you finding it hard to focus or concentrate? If someone asks you how you are feeling, is it hard to put into words? There is so much we don't know. And even the things we do know or the things we are supposed to know don't feel so definite any more.

The definition of a phobia is an irrational fear of something that is unlikely to happen. Some common phobias are spiders or bugs. Fears of ladders or heights. Fears of needles. Fears of flying in an airplane or riding in an elevator. Fears of certain numbers, like the number 13. I remember traveling to a conference and talking to a friend about how he had to disinfect his entire environment on an airplane. He wiped down his seat before he sat down, the tray table for the seat-back in front of him, the arm rests, the buttons above him; pretty much every surface. ‘Wow!’ I thought. That’s a little over the top. Another friend told me how

untrusting of his environment he was whenever he stayed in a hotel room. He refused to touch common surfaces like door knobs. His explanations made sense, but it just seemed like a huge hassle to avoid some of these every day realities of life.

But today, looking back on the behaviors of those two different friends, their behavior doesn't seem so extreme. And not completely irrational. Today we would all be doing the same type of things if we would even get to be in those kinds of environments. We would probably just call it taking the proper precautions.

So maybe it is time to reevaluate what we consider irrational or unlikely. Today in John chapter 11 we are confronted with an uncomfortable reality. We see Jesus reacting to sickness and death. We hear from the family of someone suffering. But instead of fear, even realistic fear about something that is guaranteed to happen to every person on the planet, Jesus gives us trust. When we see who Jesus is, we can find our rest and assurance in him. When we have full confidence Jesus is our resurrection and life, then we can shelter in him.

Sometimes when we chop up a chapter of the Bible and leave out certain verses it's because there is another event interrupting the one we want to focus on. Or maybe the Pharisees try to get Jesus off track from something he was teaching. But all of John chapter 11 is really about this one episode in the ministry of Jesus. It's just a longer chapter, so we focus on the key verses today. At the very beginning of the chapter, Jesus hears about Lazarus's serious sickness. Yet Jesus waits. He delays his remedy. What is going on?

Is Jesus toying with us? Is he just unconcerned? When our fears are real and Jesus appears to be absent, we are left with only questions. Doesn't God know what's going on? Why isn't he doing something?

Last week I was talking to a couple different small business owners. It's heartbreaking for me to watch what's going on. They're trying to stay in business. They're adapting and doing everything they can. But they just don't know how long they will be able to hang on. Restaurants and barber shops and coffee shops can't operate as usual. It's against the law. But the people who have the authority to tell them they can't make income the way the planned haven't come up with necessary answers. It leaves them with only confusion. They feel like they have been abandoned.

But that's the benefit of having God reveal his will to us in Scripture. No, we don't know everything. No, God hasn't given us every answer our hearts ache for. But already as soon as Jesus heard about the illness of Lazarus, John narrates for us a little insight from Jesus: **"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."** (John 11:4) Jesus has a bigger purpose in mind than curing Lazarus of whatever virus has him on hospice care at his home. Jesus picks up this **same purpose when he arrives at the entrance to the tomb in which Lazarus has been placed: "I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."** (John 11:42)

But knowing God has bigger purposes in mind and trusting that God already has things figured out doesn't always translate into immediate action. Let's go back and pick this up when Jesus arrives in Bethany. He has delayed two days. But when he arrives, Martha slips away from the house filled with mourners and goes out to meet Jesus. Martha can't hold back what she is feeling: **"if you had been here, my brother would not have died."** (John 11:21) So many thoughts have been going through her head for so long while Lazarus was sick. Now she just has questions. Not accusations. Not trying to scold Jesus. Just deep sorrow. Just profound regret. She can't hold it back. She unleashes it on Jesus.

Sometimes we don't even allow ourselves to go there. We hold it inside. Then someone else triggers it in us. Your second grader asks why she can't see her friends from school? Why did the baseball season get cancelled? Why do we have to stay away from grandma? Why did my hours get cut? What's going to happen if this thing drags on another month? How am I going to make that credit card payment? Jesus, I know you have the power to help. I know you can cure and heal and fix things. Jesus, you know we're hurting here. And I trust you. I really do. It's just, why aren't you doing anything about it?

Martha is a lot like us. We don't realize what we have. Or, more importantly, who we have.

I'm not going to lie. Sometimes I picture Jesus like some of my favorite action heroes. Like some of those bad boy, no-nonsense vengeance enacting heroes who battle through corruption and ineptitude to just do what needs to get done. The superhero who doesn't care about the rules, just does what needs to be done to rescue people. The inspirational leader who doesn't wait for the bureaucracy to move its painfully slow gears. Sometimes I picture Jesus as Clint Eastwood. Calm. Cool. Just shows up on the scene and sets everything right.

Jesus is the most unlikely hero. Jesus is here. **"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."** (John 11:5) Jesus **"was deeply moved in spirit and troubled"** when he saw Mary weeping. (John 11:33) He was overcome by grief and **"wept."** (John 11:35) And then when he got closer to the actual buried site, **"Jesus, once more deeply moved."** (John 11:38) Jesus is truly human. Jesus is not some unfeeling robot. He's not some emotionless bad boy hero either. Jesus knows heartbreak. And he is with you in your pain. Jesus is here.

Jesus knows the pain of death. He felt it for you. Jesus knows the grief caused by loss. Everything he had, everything that rightfully belonged to him, he gave up when he came to this earth. Everything seemed to be chaos for Jesus. Rejected by the religious leaders. Betrayed by his most trusted friends. Forsaken by fickle crowds. Executed for claiming to be who he really was. And yet the answers to why it was all happening and why did God let this go on is you. Jesus faced a confusing fate and the heartbreak of abandonment to give you certainty in a world full of fears. Real and irrational. Hebrews 2 gives us a little insight into what happened to Jesus and why: **"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."** (Hebrews 2:14,15) Jesus died rose to give you certainty of your resurrection.

It's interesting to read some of the listicles and the memes going on right now. People are trying to laugh during this difficult time. Others are just offering practical advice and teaching us to be healthy and grateful. But some surveys can be very informative. What enables life to be a little less miserable as we shelter in place? Internet that keeps us connected to the world outside our homes. Kitchen appliances that allow us to copy our favorite restaurants and recipes. Delivery or take out for the things we can't make at home. Online shopping that gets you the products you need without having to invade the germ-infested commercial centers. Smart phones that keep us occupied. And when we take stock of so many of these things we have, it helps us keep our minds off of the few things we are without. The kinds of things that take up our attention. All the things we think we can't live without.

Jesus wants us to see not just WHAT he is, but WHO he is. That's the whole point of the conversation between Jesus and Martha. She knows Jesus. She trusts in Jesus. She believes. But Jesus wants her to see who he is. Martha has hopes for her brother. She knows his death isn't the end. Jesus wants her to look to him for those hopes. Jesus wants her to see those hopes realized right there, right then in his person no matter what happens at the tomb of Lazarus. Take shelter in Jesus.

Jesus delayed his arrival, timed it perfectly for maximum impact. His glory shines out. His divine power put on display will cause many people to place their trust in him. Jesus isn't just a miracle worker. He's not just a healer. Jesus is the very Son of God. Jesus is the one who has power over death. His own resurrection shows that death is not the end. Jesus is all-powerful over all the worst forces of this world. Jesus is merciful in the face of life's greatest tragedies. Jesus says: **"I am the resurrection and the life."** (John 11:25)

So many times we look at this episode where Jesus raises Lazarus back to life and we immediately look to the future. In just a matter of days, Jesus himself will rise from the dead. We look down the road farther to the end of all things when Jesus will call each of us from our own graves. Those are all true. And the resurrection of Jesus establishes your resurrection and mine as certain. But in this miracle, Jesus brings the future into the present.

What you have now is Jesus. Who Jesus is: the resurrection and the life. Jesus is true God. Jesus embodies all your hopes. Jesus is your basis for confidence. Jesus is your victory when life seems tragically doomed. Jesus is your triumph when you feel hopelessly confused. Jesus is your life. To live is to believe. To believe is to live with Jesus.

The poet Dylan Thomas was famous for the poem that instructs: "Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Jesus gives you a better alternative. In life, shelter in Jesus. Each day know he is your resurrection. Walk daily knowing he is your life. Hold onto Jesus. Embrace Jesus. Trust Jesus. Receive his blessings. Live with his joy. Take shelter in his comfort. Live with hope.

That's probably hard to put into an emoji. Maybe you aren't smiling every step of every day. You don't need to have a silly grin plastered across your face. You can live with confidence. You can face uncertainty with relief. You shelter in Jesus, the resurrection and the life. Amen.