

Echoes of Scripture

Lent 5a ~ John 11:1-45

Summary of John 11:1-45

Jesus hears news that Lazarus is sick while hiding out east of the Jordan from those who want to stone him in the temple. Jesus delays two days and then heads back to Judea where he greets the sisters, shares in their grief, and then raises Lazarus from the dead. The buildup to the event (where Jesus interprets this sign) is almost as significant as the event itself; which happens in only two verses.

Suggested Course of Study

- Read the whole story as found in John 10:1-12:11

Immediate Context

John 8:1-11 The Woman Caught in Adultery

John 8:12-20 Jesus the Light of the World

John 8:21-30 Jesus Foretells His Death

John 8:31-38 True Disciples

John 8:39-59 Jesus and Abraham

John 9:1-41 A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

John 10:1-21 Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:22-42 Jesus is Rejected by the Jews

John 11:1-45 Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

John 11:45-57 The Plot to Kill Jesus

John 12:1-8 Mary Anoints Jesus

John 12:9-11 The Plot to Kill Lazarus

John 12:12-19 The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

John 12:20-26 Some Greeks wish to see Jesus

John 12:27-36 Jesus speaks about his death

John 12:37-43 The unbelief of the people

John 12:44-50 Summary of Jesus' teaching

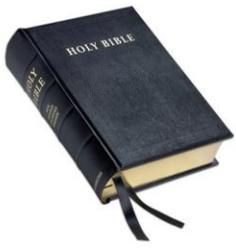
John 13:1-20 Jesus washes the disciples' feet

As the context above shows, this story doesn't end with verse 45. The story continues through verse 11 of chapter 12. And the ending of the story is critical to understanding the story as a whole as well as the lead in to the passion of Christ. In John's gospel, this event is the "last straw" for the desire to kill Jesus. In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), it is the cleansing of the temple (which in John occurs at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and immediately sets Jesus at odds with "some" of the religious leaders; not all). It is impossible to preach this text without referring to what happens as a result of it; without at least mentioning the events found in John 11:45-12:11.

OTHER BIBLICAL RESURRECTION STORIES: 1 Kings 17:17-24, Elijah and the widow of Zarephath's son; 2 Kings 4:20-37, Elisha and the Shunamite's son; 2 Kings 13:21, the corpse touches Elisha's bones; Luke 7:11-16, Jesus and the widow of Nain's son; Mark 5:35-43, Jesus and Jairus' daughter; John 11:1-44, Jesus and Lazarus; Matthew 27:51-53, several bodies of saints after Jesus died on the cross; Acts 9:36-41, Peter and Tabitha (also known as Dorcas); and Acts 20:7-12, Paul and Eutychus. And of course, we cannot forget the story in Ezekiel 37:1-14, the valley of dry bones.

Key Words

SIGNS – While this word isn't contained in this passage, it is very close. In verse 47, in response to what has happened, there is a meeting of the Sanhedrin called by the Pharisees and Chief Priests to decide what to do



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about Jesus. They are concerned because he is performing “so many signs”. So on that day, they plan to kill him. The gospel of John is the book of signs and this is the last and greatest sign of them all:

- Changing water into wine at Cana (John 2:1-11)
- The healing of the royal official's son at Cana (John 4:46-54)
- The healing of a paralytic in Jerusalem (John 5:1-9)
- The feeding of the five thousand in Galilee (John 6:1-14)
- Walking on water in Galilee (John 6:15-25)
- Giving sight to a man born blind in Jerusalem (John 9:1-12)
- The resurrection of Lazarus in Bethany (John 11:1-45)

LAZARUS – Lazarus is a form of the name Eleazar, which means "God is my help." This is *NOT* the same person who is mentioned in the parable in Luke 16. He only appears here and in chapter 12.

BETHANY – A town located on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives, 3 kilometers east of Jerusalem. In the synoptic gospels it is the headquarters of Jesus during the final week of his life (see Mark 11:11, Matthew 21:17, and Luke 19:29). In Mark, prior to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sends some of his disciples ahead of him to Bethany to secure a donkey that he can ride (see Mark 11:1). Bethany also shows up in Luke during the scene of Jesus' ascension (see Luke 24:50).

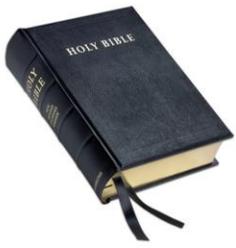
MARY AND MARTHA – Mary and Martha appear in Luke 10:38-42. Mary will anoint Jesus' feet and wipe them with her hair in John 12:1-8; though it is strangely mentioned in this text at verse 2. She is criticized by Judas for wasting the costly perfume. He thought it could have been sold so that the money could be given to the poor. But Jesus says, "Leave her alone. She has kept this for the day of my burial." Why is it mentioned? Especially since it happens just a chapter later? My guess is that the gospel writer wants us to be thinking about the death of Jesus when we hear this story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. But wasn't it Mary Magdalene who anointed Jesus' feet? Hmmmm...

GLORY – See Exodus 24:17; 33:20-23. Later in John's gospel, the cross will be Christ's glorification (see John 12:23; 13:31-32).

HE WHOM YOU LOVE – In John 20:2, Mary Magdalene runs to Simon Peter and the other disciple, “the one whom Jesus loved”, and says “they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” And so the two go running, and this other disciple outruns Peter and reaches the tomb first. He bends down, looks in, sees the linen wrappings lying there, but he doesn't go in. Peter, however, goes right in. And finally, the other disciple, follows him. He saw and believed. Then they returned to their homes. Could it have been Lazarus who had run to the tomb?

THOUGH JESUS LOVED MARTHA AND HER SISTER AND LAZARUS – Ahhh... to be loved by Jesus. Jesus loves his own (John 13:1, 34) and Jesus loves the Father (John 14:31). “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (see John 15:13). Jesus says this to his disciples after having washed their feet and having given them the new command to love one another (see John 13:35). Jesus' love doesn't protect them from pain or sadness.

HE STAYED TWO DAYS LONGER IN THE PLACE WHERE HE WAS – Where was Jesus? According to John 10:40, Jesus had crossed the Jordan River and gone to the place where John had been baptizing earlier because the Jews at the temple in Jerusalem had taken up stones to stone him. Why did he stay two days longer? This is a good question. He receives an urgent message from the sisters that the “one he loves” is sick. And yet, he remains across the Jordan about 15 miles away; an arduous day's journey on foot especially considering



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Bethany is near Jerusalem which is 760 meters above sea level and the Dead Sea, near where John was baptizing, is 400 meters below sea level; a significant change in altitude.

THE LIGHT IS NOT IN THEM – Jesus talks more about the light of the world, but this time, the light is not inside them; so they stumble. His talk about walking while it is day reminds us of what Jesus says in the story of the man born blind in John 9.

HAS FALLEN ASLEEP – *κεκοίμηται* from *κοιμάω* meaning literally *sleep*, to *fall asleep* or figuratively or euphemistically (for dying) *fall asleep, die*.

AWAKEN – *ἐξυπνίσω* from *ἐξυπνίζω* meaning (of sleeping persons) to *cause to wake up* or *rouse*; (of dead people) to *awaken* or *cause to be alive again*. This word is made up of the prefix meaning “out of” and the root meaning “sleep”.

HE WILL BE ALRIGHT – *σωθήσεται* from *σώζω* meaning to *save* or *deliver* or *make whole* or *preserve safe from danger*.

SLEEP – *τῆς κοιμήσεως τοῦ ὕπνου*; *τῆς κοιμήσεως* from *κοίμησις* meaning *the act of sleeping* or *taking rest in sleep*; *ὑπνου* from *ὑπνος* meaning literally *sleep* (notice we get our word hypnosis from this root).

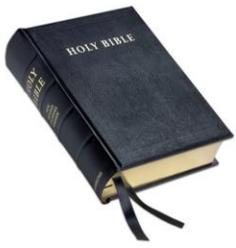
THOMAS, THE TWIN – Θωμᾶς (Thomas), who is called Δίδυμος (Didymos; which means “twin”). He is first mentioned here, but then appears again in John 20:24-29 (where Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection) and John 21:2 (where several disciples were out fishing on the Sea of Tiberias—Sea of Galilee or Lake of Gennesaret—and Jesus tells them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. He shows great courage here being willing to go and die with Jesus.

FOUR DAYS – (See verses 17 and 39). This is the number of days Lazarus was in the tomb. It’s an unusual number considering that three days has so much significance in terms of Jesus’ death and resurrection. So why four days? Apparently Jewish people believed that the soul remained in the vicinity of the body for three days, hoping to rejoin the body. On the fourth day, the soul finally faces reality and departs. So the fact that Lazarus has been in the tomb four days means that there can be no possibility of his soul rejoining his body. Four days is shorthand for “hopeless”. The official period of mourning lasted seven days.

LORD, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE – Are these words by Martha (and later Mary) a rebuke (reproach) or a regret? Is she saying “If you had been here (and you could have!), my brother wouldn’t have died”? Or is she saying “only you had been here (but unfortunately you weren’t), my brother wouldn’t have died”? Remember how far away Jesus was. How long would it have taken the messenger to get to him? And how long would it have taken Jesus to come once he heard the message? The assumption is that Martha would know that Jesus probably couldn’t have arrived in time to prevent Jesus’ death.

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE – This is another of the “I AM” (see the burning bush story in Exodus 3:14) statements in John’s gospel where Jesus reveals his true identity (not only as God incarnate but also portions of his character or nature). Here Jesus is saying that the resurrection and new life isn’t limited to the distant future (the end of days) as Martha assumes. Both words are important here: resurrection and life. Notice the footnote that says that other ancient authorities omit “and the life”. Is it redundant? What if it isn’t?!! What does new life in Jesus look like?

THE ONE COMING INTO THE WORLD – *Coming into the world* is a frequent phrase of importance for Jesus. It appears at (John 1:9, 6:14 3:19; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37). Martha’s confession of faith is significant. See also Peter’s statement in John 6:68-69 (don’t forget to see the footnote about what other ancient authorities say).



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WEeping – κλαίουσαν from κλαίω which means to *weep, wail, lament* (implying not only the shedding of tears, expressing strong internal emotions of grief). This is the loud demonstrative kind of weeping. The emphasis is on the noise accompanying the weeping.

GREATLY DISTURBED – ἐνεβριμήσατο from ἐμβριμάομαι meaning greatly disturbed, often associated with anger. To roar, storm with anger. To be enraged. To express indignation against someone. Why would Jesus be angry? Who has made Jesus angry?

DEEPLY MOVED – ἐτάραξεν from ταρασσω meaning to cause acute emotional distress, to stir up. This word shows up again in John 12:27 (the arrival of his hour) and 13:21 (mentioning he will be betrayed). Jesus uses this word in John 14:1 and 14:27 when talk about his departure. He tells the disciples not to let their hearts be troubled.

JESUS BEGAN TO WEEP – ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. ἐδάκρυσεν from δακρυον meaning to weep, with the clear implication of shedding tears; to cry. What if we translated it as “Jesus shed a tear”?

TAKE AWAY THE STONE – We lose the shocking nature of this command. This would be like someone showing up to the cemetery four days after the burial while the family is visiting and saying, “Hey guys! Grab a shovel and dig him up!”

FATHER, I THANK YOU FOR HAVING HEARD ME – In this prayer, which Jesus indicates is really for the benefit of others, he acknowledges a previous private/internal prayer which God has heard.

LAZARUS, COME OUT – Jesus calls Lazarus by name and Lazarus comes out. This has echoes of Jesus’ discussion of being the Good Shepherd from John 10. The sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd who calls them by name (See John 10:3).