

Reading and Reflection
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April 6, 2014

11 A man named Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, became sick. Bethany was the town where Mary and her sister Martha lived. (2 This Mary was the one who poured the perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was sick.) 3 The sisters sent Jesus a message: "Lord, your dear friend is sick."

4 When Jesus heard it, he said, "The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory." 5 Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days.

Reflection: Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus. But the crocuses were about to bloom by the banks of the Jordan. Jesus stayed near those flowers, he tarried, he waited, dragging his feet. Why? Were those flowers so precious, compared to the love of Martha and Mary and Lazarus? No. Jesus tarried, because he knew that glory was coming. The glory of a hillside covered in yellow and white, the glory of God's word breaking into our world, the glory that was coming on a cross in Jerusalem. He wanted to make sure that no one could mistake God's power. So he waited for a flower to bloom and a man to die. The Jews believed that a person's soul hovered close to a body for 3 days after death. Jesus tarried, so that everyone would know that Lazarus was truly gone. Whatever the intention, he knew that it would cause pain. How often does it feel that God is tarrying, that God is absent? And that feeling overwhelms the fragile, tender hope of healing. And yet, we know: Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus

7 Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

8 "Teacher," the disciples answered, "just a short time ago the people there wanted to stone you; and are you planning to go back?"

9 Jesus said, "A day has twelve hours, doesn't it? So those who walk in broad daylight do not stumble, for they see the light of this world. 10 But if they walk during the night they stumble, because they have no light." 11 Jesus said this and then added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go and wake him up."

12 The disciples answered, "If he is asleep, Lord, he will get well."

13 Jesus meant that Lazarus had died, but they thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, 15 but for your sake I am glad that I was not with him, so that you will believe. Let us go to him."

16 Thomas (called the Twin) said to his fellow disciples, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!"

Reflection: Let us go to Lazarus. The two days have past, and sleep has become death. Obeying the inner clock of his mission, Jesus leaves the crocus budding-the sign of hope -and turns to the place of no hope. Let us go to Judea, the place of danger. Then speaks the Twin, in the courage born, not of hope, but of despair: "Let us all go. Lazarus is dead, Jesus will be stoned, we cannot leave him now." There is a glimpse of glory here, already: the glory of a friend's love, revealed in this simple statement. Let us go.

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Judeans had come to see Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother's death.

²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!" ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for."

²³ "Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her.

²⁴ "I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Reflection: "If only you had been here." We did all we could. We nursed our brother, we sent for help. We did not tarry. We trusted you. Even now, there is a glimmer of trust, tangled in the regret and the pain. Jesus, you promised something more than this, in all of our conversations. You promised abundant life, bubbling up like springs of water, you promised glory. Now it seems that that will have to wait for the resurrection day, whenever that is. Until then, we are in the desert of grief. Until then, "belief" is all I have. And, I have to say, sometimes "belief," even in the Son of God, is cold comfort.

²⁸ After Martha said this, she went back and called her sister Mary privately. "The Teacher is here," she told her, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up and hurried out to meet him. (³⁰ Jesus had not yet arrived in the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.) ³¹ The people who were in the house with Mary comforting her followed her when they saw her get up and hurry out. They thought that she was going to the grave to weep there.

³² Mary arrived where Jesus was, and as soon as she saw him, she fell at his feet. "Lord," she said, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died!"

Reflection: "If only you had been here." The same words, but somehow sister Mary is always more dramatic than anyone else. She sees Jesus and throws herself at her feet. She seems to have caught the mourning fever from the extravagance of the crowd of comforters. The emotional pitch, the keening and the wailing, was rising. Mary does not say anything about belief. Her words are raw, accusing, uncensored: "You did not come soon enough. If only you had not tarried, there on the banks of the Jordan. We needed you, then, four days ago."

³³ Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. ³⁴ "Where have you buried him?" he asked them.

"Come and see, Lord," they answered.

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ "See how much he loved him!" the people said.

³⁷ But some of them said, "He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?"

Reflection: See how much he loved him. The grief is catching, and even Jesus feels it. Even the Resurrection and the Life weeps now in the face of searing pain and waning hope. The empathy with those who grieve without hope is complete. Jesus, the Word made flesh, shares our common lot. And also hears again the accusation, the echo of "if only..." He can heal, he can give sight.

There was no reason for Lazarus to die. If he truly loved him, he would not be weeping at the graveside now.

³⁸ Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance. ³⁹ "Take the stone away!" Jesus ordered.

Martha, the dead man's sister, answered, "There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!"

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?" ⁴¹ They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "I thank you, Father, that you listen to me. ⁴² I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me." ⁴³ After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and with a cloth around his face. "Untie him," Jesus told them, "and let him go."

Reflection: The stone blocks his way. The stone blocks the way to glory. We get a shiver of premonition here, remembering that another stone will need to be rolled away, on another spring morning. This time, the way is blocked by a stone, by an impossible four days, by a community that cannot hope for glory. The Resurrection and the Life utters a command, "Take the Stone away!" And then another, "Come out!" And then another, "Untie him and let him go!" At each step of the way, God's glory is revealed because people respond to those commands. This is not God's work alone. Those standing by are drawn into the redeeming, resurrecting, liberating sign. The love of friends and the power of God unite for one more sign, the last sign Jesus reveals before his own moment of glory, on a hill outside Jerusalem.

⁴⁵ Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him. 12:1- Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, the man he had raised from death.

Reflection: The last sign, the ultimate challenge to death, leads to the preparation of the Passover feast. It is time to sit once more at the table of friends. It is a chance to reveal the mystery of love and freedom one more time. The crocus is in full bloom. The feast of sacrificial love begins. The resurrected man hosts the meal. The waiting is over.

And yet, here, we still wait for a process of resurrection. We still wait for flowers to bloom and friends to get well. Our "belief" is tempered with caution, our trust is muted with cynicism. We still wait for a glimmer of glory.

Let us pray: God of Life, out of the depths we pray as we wait for your presence. May we hear your voice when called to take away the stone, and put our hands and muscles to that work. May we hear your voice when called to come out of darkness and despair. May we hear your voice when called to unbind those trapped in hopelessness and misery. May we see the light of day and walk by your light. Amen.