Feb. 18, 2018 Jesus Raises Lazarus John 11:1-44 (Psalm 104:27- 30) Liturgical color: Purple

PRAYER OF THE DAY God of new life, As Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, renew and restore us to new life, leaving in the grave all that prevents us from loving you fully. Amen. HYMNS The glory of these forty days ELW 320, H82 143 I am the bread of life ELW 485 Jesus is a rock in a weary land ELW 333 CHORAL God so loved the world, Robert Chilcott

Psalm 104:27-30

27 These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

28 when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

**Announcements Prayers**

Joan and Harry Schaum

Parkland Florida – people looking for action/reform

Children’s Message:

Ashes, Lent

Sermon:

The order is all jumbled-up. This chapter begins by explaining that there is a man named Lazarus who was ill in Bethany who had sisters named Mary and Martha. As far as their involvement in this episode… Lazarus in really only in 2 verses (John 11:43-44); and while we’re at it, Mary, we’re told is “the one who anointed Jesus” (11:2), but that experience at this same home does not unfold until the next chapter (12:3). So we are left with ‘and Martha’. The same Martha who in the other gospels is busy with housework and ‘chooses wrongly’ when she complains that Mary is just sitting at the feet of Jesus learning from his great teachings. But here in John’s gospel, the order is all jumbled-up… so that what Martha has to say becomes a central focus in this chapter in the ministry of Jesus and his Love. Although it does not look much like that at the beginning.

The sisters send a message to Jesus who is hiding in Ephraim with his disciples… the message is about life and death for one whom Jesus loves. We as listeners in this lack of an encounter are told what Jesus is thinking… Mary and Martha seem to get nothing. No return message, no Jesus, no intervention in their anguish. We know people who are here in their faith lives… people whose relationship with Jesus may have been close but then later arrested by what seems to be “unanswered questions and unmet requests”[[1]](#footnote-1) or simply silence. People who agonize through the kind of illness that does lead to death… and here John is jumbled-up again. We want a Jesus who will come immediately, at our bidding, with our timing, in our urgency, full of our answers, and living-up to our expectations… that’s a magic-wand Jesus. “God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son …” (John 3:16) not to be a magic wand Jesus.

No, we were given a jumbled-up Jesus. One who speaks the truth, although that truth makes so little sense to our human sensibilities that often it is unrecognizable as truth until well after the fact. “This illness does not lead to death.” – well yes it does, Mary and Martha, and all their friends would adamantly contend. But let Jesus finish his sentence “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.” … ah, true! Eventually, but things got all jumbled-up first. (11:14) Lazarus is asleep… Lazarus is dead… and for your sake I’m glad I was not there.” Again; *what*!? Jesus has been doing all kinds of miracles and healings, he has been there for all kinds of people Jew and Gentile, man and woman, Samaritan believer and doubters… but when his close friends called on his life-saving miracle presence… nothing. In fact by the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, the agony of a life-ending illness, and those last days and hours, and those first ones of mourning, and burial, and heart-wrenching pain… they had already happened. Neighbors were still gathered at the house, but when Martha heard that Jesus was coming; Martha went to meet Jesus outside the home, outside of the consolers; outside of our expectations, and Martha laid her truth on the line “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (11:21). But Martha did not stop at her anger, she did not stop in her belief, and she did not stop her confession of her truth… she believes: “But even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” And that’s not all: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

But this is all jumbled-up isn’t it? Martha is confessing that Jesus is the Messiah right there in the middle of her pain; right there when it really looks like Jesus is too late… and they are away from the others. Martha confesses that Jesus is the anointed one, the Messiah, the resurrection and the life… right there in the center of death and grief.

And Jesus… he’s still in the middle of chastisement, Martha goes back to the village, back to their home to talk privately with her sister Mary, and then Mary comes to lay it on Jesus “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Mary was weeping, and the community of faith was weeping, and soon Jesus was weeping with them all… well most, some were already busy judging, couldn’t this Jesus who heals the blind have kept Lazarus from dying?

After all this pain…. Jesus confronts death and calls forth life with a prayer. Most would believe that Jesus does not have a prayer. But really Jesus doesn’t need a prayer. We do, in order to understand. This confronting death and calling forth life for Lazarus… this enactment of the kingdom of God breaking into the world, brings life for Lazarus, yet it also brings death for Jesus. The miracle worker has finished placing his signs, and they point to Jesus as Messiah, they point to death from life, and they point to Jerusalem, they point the chief priests and Pharisees (11:57) to sacrifice one for many and they point to death for the giver of life… things are all jumbled-up here in John’s gospel. Jesus’ movement toward Jerusalem is a move toward his death. Those who follow Jesus are not spared from suffering; we join him in it.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The order is all jumbled-up.

So is the truth: If we had been where we needed to be; Jesus would not have died.

Mary anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. (Christ, Messiah = anointed John 1:41) mentioned in John 11:2 but doesn’t happen until John 12:3! (then Martha served the meal and Mary anointed feet of Jesus.)

Martha calls Jesus to account; he could have come sooner, and heartache could have been averted. (No answer to this pain-complain.) but Martha does not stop there!

After this raising Jesus and his disciples went into hiding in Ephraim… too many signs.

*Notes from Working Preacher podcast:*

*Culmination 7th of 7 signs… 1st sign is wedding at Cana water to wine… ‘do whatever he tells you’ – Mary mom*

*“Death is real but not final” Craig Koester – death and resurrection theme*

*If you’ve been with child with 104 fever at 2am; in ICU with loved one… lord the one whom you love is ill*

*Raising of Lazarus is 2 verses… this is the confession of Martha (from working preacher commentary)*

*Resurrection and the life… in John’s gospel ascension beyond grace of resurrection – conquer death, leads to on-going abiding life with Jesus/God forever.*

*Jesus delays; inexplicable, too late. Lord if you’d been here my brother would not have died… Martha hadn’t given-up; Jesus didn’t say I AM resurrection and life at the end… instead the promise is in the middle when Lazarus is dead in the tomb! The divine message is in the middle of a situation we/one can’t explain. Jesus didn’t answer why he didn’t come faster.*

*Promise designed to call us forward. Must life through this experience even when we don’t understand*

*As long as death remains real, Christ isn’t done*

*Cling to the promise of life. This is what Jesus provides here and now.*

*This is the impedius for the arrest of Jesus; not just giving blind man sight on the Sabbath… this is beyond the line in the sand*

*I believe in the resurrection in the last day… NO… that resurrection and new life is NOW with Jesus*

*Martha – Luke – she’s busy and Mary listens to Jesus, better choice*

*Martha in John’s gospel – both say if you were here brother would not have died; Mary weeps- Jesus weeps; Martha confession – Jesus’ promise*

*At the end: Jesus does for Laz. And JC promises to do for others*

*Death is real but not final*

*Jesus continues to call people to faith and life; faith that has a future to it*

*End of narrative podcast*

Commentary on John 11:1-44 by Lindsey Trozzo

This story in John 11 often carries the heading “Jesus Raises Lazarus,” but Jaime Clark-Soles calls it “The Confession of Martha.”1

As Gail O’Day aptly describes, “The miracle of the raising of Lazarus is the climax of John 11:1-44, but it is not its center...The conversation between Martha and Jesus is the theological heart of the story.”2

Luke (perhaps preserving a memory of the same family) pits Mary, who sits at Jesus’ feet against Martha, who is busy attending to the affairs of the house. Mary, Luke tells us, has chosen the better part (Luke 10:42). John, if he is aware of this tradition, flips the script (as he is often fond of doing). Martha -- taking initiative and speaking frankly -- matches Luke’s description, but here it is the bold and busy Martha who becomes the exemplar. This sister musters up a confession of faith in the midst of mourning. We’ll look to her story for an example of finding hope in sadness; you might call it, “Good Grief.”

**Good grief**

Martha goes out to meet Jesus with a complaint. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21). We can picture grief, confusion, and even anger in Martha’s voice. The implicit assumptions behind Martha’s statement (also echoed by Mary in John 11:32), find voice through the mourners who meet them at the tomb: “Could not he who opened the eyes of the man who was blind have kept this man from dying?” (John 11:37).

The grief is palpable. Mary’s grief even keeps her at home, until Jesus calls her directly. Met by Jesus, both sisters weep, and Jesus joins them in their mourning. This is no insignificant detail. The Johannine Jesus -- the Word from before time, one with the Father, ever in-control -- is overcome by grief. The one who is the resurrection and the life, the one who (we can only presume) knows that he will soon call the dead man from the tomb, weeps for his beloved Lazarus. He is so moved that some in the crowd exclaim: “See how he loved him!” (John 11:35-36).

“But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him” (John 11:22). Even now, she says. It is in her grief that Martha exercises hopeful faith. When Jesus promises that Lazarus will rise again, Martha thinks in eschatological terms and looks to a resurrection at the end. Jesus brings her focus back to the present and back to his person: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26).

Those who believe will never die? Of course they will die. Everyone dies. Lazarus will die again (especially if the high priests have their way; John 12:10). Even Jesus will die. Jesus seems to speak in contradictory terms, but then again, such dialectical thinking is necessary for hope in the midst of grief. In fact, it is Jesus’ death in John that introduces the great paradox: victory in death; blessed salvation in accursed crucifixion; hope in the midst of grief. Jesus doesn’t promise physical life without physical death. He promises an experience of abundant life that swallows up the sting of death.

We might think of the prophet’s words: “Where is your indictment, death, where is your sting?” (Hosea 13:14). With images that find echoes throughout John’s Gospel, Hosea speaks of times past, when God provided food in the desert (think John 6), water in the wilderness (think John 4 and 7) -- and looks to a time yet to come when Israel’s abundance will be likened to a vineyard of ripened vines, ready for the pressing of fine wine (think John 2). But as we see in Hosea, sometimes the past and the future are more hope-filled than the present.

Like Martha, we all grieve. And like Martha, we are invited to give that grief the space it deserves. Like Martha, we may wish to escape the present grief by looking far ahead or gazing back to the past. Like Martha, we are invited to find hope even in the grief. Hope even now, as Martha claims. Life even in death, as Jesus promises.

“I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (John 11:27). It is the presence of Jesus, the one coming into the world, that gives Martha hope in the midst of grief.

Theodicy -- the confession of God’s goodness amidst experiences that make evil undeniable -- is a tall order. We often cry to God with the sisters, “if only you had been here!”3 Martha encourages us to believe that God is the one who moves into the world -- with all of its darkness, brokenness, and grief. Martha reminds us that even in unanswered questions and unmet requests, we are not alone.

The Gospel reminds us that God joined our human experience of loss and death. The ironic suggestion of Thomas, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16) is full of meaning. Jesus’ movement toward Jerusalem is a move toward his death. Those who follow Jesus are not spared from suffering; we join him in it. However, the presence of Jesus brings a quality of life that numbs the significance of death.4With Hosea, we can ask, “Death, where is your sting?” Even though we die; we live. Even when we grieve, we hope -- for we are not alone.5

### Notes:

1. Jaime Clark-Soles, Reading John for Dear Life (Louisville: WJK, 2016), 71.
2. Gail R. O’Day, “John” in Women’s Bible Commentary, ed. Carole A Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: WJK, 2012), 521
3. Clark-Soles, Reading John for Dear Life, 79-80.
4. Jo-Ann Brant, John, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 182.
5. See Brant, John, 182. cf. John 16:33

{RWK -  Christ the Messiah is the anointed one; John didn’t want us to miss this reality in chapter 11 nor can we in chapter 12.

1. Lindsay Trozzo [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lindsay Trozzo – Working Preacher commentary [↑](#footnote-ref-2)