

John 11:17-27;38-45
Lent 5; March 29, 2020

When a situation is bad, people want to change it. Sometimes they succeed; sometimes they fail. In 1997, Steve Jobs returned to Apple and turned it from a failing company to one of the most valuable companies in the world. In 2014 LeBron James returned to the Cleveland Cavaliers with the goal of giving the city its first professional championship in more than 50 years, and he did in 2016. Every presidential candidate says that they will change the culture of Washington and actually get something done. Are they ever able to say that they have succeeded? I'll let you decide that one.

Yet, there are some places that don't change. Their purpose for existing remains the same. One of those places is the cemetery. Most cemeteries never get smaller; many only get larger every year. Residents never move to another location, but new residents are always moving in, but they are all dead. Nothing changes except the flower arrangements left by relatives at the graves of their loved ones. Even if the most powerful person in this world walks in a cemetery, nothing happens. Nothing changes. But when Jesus walks into a cemetery, some pretty amazing things happen. **"When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face."** Even death cannot keep its grip on Lazarus.

Sooner or later everyone has to deal with death – with their own death. We may try to put it off. We'll try almost anything to hold back death. But unless Jesus comes before we die, every single one of us is going to die. It really is something that is completely out of our control. Maybe that is what makes death so hard for us to deal with. It seems so final. There are no loopholes, no exemptions and no deductions. That is just the truth.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were close friends with Jesus. The relationship between these three people was more than a friendship. He was their teacher and they considered themselves his disciples. When it became clear that Lazarus was not getting any better, they sent a messenger to Jesus asking him to come. As Mary and Martha watched their brother begin to slip away, they called for Jesus. John tells us: **"When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."** That's all they needed to hear. If Jesus said that Lazarus would not die, that is all they needed to hear. They felt that Jesus had everything under control. Perhaps, it didn't really bother them that he stayed away for a couple more days. If Jesus said that their brother's sickness wasn't going to end in death, that was good enough for them.

But then the unexpected happened. Lazarus died. Jesus was supposed to fix this situation. Lazarus wasn't supposed to die. Martha runs off to meet Jesus. **"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."** What do you see in Martha's statement? Heartbreak? Emotion? Faith? I see all of those, and they all spilled out of her heart with her words. She doesn't ask or tell Jesus to do anything, but what do you think she is implying with her words, **"I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask"**? She knew that Jesus could raise the dead. She knew that Jesus could fix even this. But it seemed like Jesus was telling her that she needed to wait.

She knew that promises that Jesus had spoken. Yet, the reality was Lazarus was dead. He didn't get there soon enough to keep him from dying. Perhaps Martha was getting into this wrestling match that we all have done with God. *I know what you have promised God. I want to believe it. Yet, I just don't understand what you are doing God.* Ever felt like that? Ever felt like God isn't listening to you? But Jesus had something much better in mind for not just Mary and Martha to see, but for all to see. Jesus was still in control. It takes Jesus four days to get to Mary and Martha. It looked like Jesus was very late. But maybe, that was Jesus' point.

He wanted everyone to see that Lazarus was very dead. Death seems so final. Cemeteries never get emptier. As we get older we bury more and more of our friends and family members until only we are left. There seems no way out of it. Yet, there is a way. That's what Jesus wanted the people of Bethany to see that day. You see, the solution to death is

Jesus. He answers Martha's questions. Jesus answers all of our questions with this simple response. **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** Death came into this world as a result of sin. But Jesus says to us that he is bigger than death. **"I am the resurrection and the life."** Did you catch what he said there? He didn't just say that he gives resurrection and life to people. He says: **"I AM..."**

In 1997, when Steve Jobs came back to the company that he had founded, Apple, it was that Steve Jobs had decided that if Apple were to be saved, he would be the one to do it. He did. Even after his death, when someone hears the name of Steve Jobs, they think of Apple.

Steve Jobs is nothing compared to Jesus. No CEO is anything compared to Jesus. Jesus says: **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** Without me, you have nothing. I am your life, Jesus says. Even Death could not hold its grip on Lazarus. What a sight that must have been in that cemetery as the stone was rolled away. **Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 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."**

When you look at that tomb of Lazarus, you can't help but think of another tomb. You can't help but think of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. When Jesus came out of that tomb, he guaranteed us that all of the sin in our life is forgiven. He paid the price on that cross on Good Friday. **"It is finished!"**

Someday Jesus will walk into the cemetery where you are buried and say the word, and that word, which is the power of God, will make your body live and be reunited with your soul, because when Jesus walks into a cemetery, amazing things happen! What power is behind these words of Jesus! **"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"** When you look at Jesus, **"see the glory of God!"** Amen.