

Sermon March 22, 2026

John 11: 1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, '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.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord,

if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, '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. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'

'So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may

believe that you sent me.’ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

When God Is Late

“Out of the depths I call you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!” We cry out when the phone call comes too late, when the apology arrives after the damage is already done, when the help shows up after the crisis has swallowed us whole. We know this ache. And so do Mary and Martha. They sent word to Jesus: “Lord, the one you love is ill.” And Jesus... waits. We don’t know why, but he does. He delays, he lingers, he stays put.

By the time he arrives, the dust has settled, the casseroles have been delivered, and Lazarus has been dead four days. Four long days—as the body and hope to decay. Jesus was too late.

When Jesus finally shows up, Martha doesn’t welcome him as she usually does. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Her heart is breaking at the loss of her beloved brother... and the loss of trust in their beloved friend.

Martha speaks the same words we whisper in hospital rooms, in courtrooms, in the quiet of our own hearts:

If you had been here...

If you had acted sooner...

If you had stopped this...

If you had just shown up...

She comes to Jesus with honesty and sorrow, and Jesus meets her where she is. When Mary comes, she falls at his feet, echoing the same lament.

Two sisters, two voices, one shared grief. And Jesus does not defend

himself or offer theological explanations.

He weeps.

The Son of God stands at the tomb of a beloved friend and lets his tears fall into the dust. This is not a God who hovers above our pain. This is a God who feels our pain in God's sacred bones. But our story does not end with tears.

"Take away the stone," he says.

Martha protests—because she knows what death smells like. She knows what four days in the heat means. She knows the difference between hope and denial. But Jesus insists.

And here is the mystery: God refuses to let the grave have the final word. Sometimes resurrection does not come on our schedule. Sometimes liberation does not arrive before the suffering. Sometimes justice does not break forth before the harm is done.

Delay is not abandonment; lateness is not absence. God is not late because God doesn't care. God is "late" because God is moving toward a deeper liberation than we imagined. The promises fulfilled right before our eyes
Jesus cries out with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!"

And the dead man walks out to them. But he walks out still bound. Still wrapped in the strips of cloth that death left behind. Jesus turns to the community and says, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Resurrection is God's work. Unbinding is ours. We want God to do everything. We want God to fix the world without involving us. But Jesus shows us that liberation is communal. God calls life out of death, and then God hands the work of unbinding to human hands. To unbind and free those who are wrapped in shame, fear and injustice. We are called to unbind the world from all that keep it entombed.

Resurrection is not complete until the community participates. And we need to do this because we live in a world full of tombs.

Tombs of injustice.

Tombs of racism and white supremacy.

Tombs of poverty and policymade despair.

Tombs of transphobia, homophobia, misogyny.

Tombs of violence in our streets and in our world.

We cry out like Mary and Martha: If you had been here... If you had acted sooner... the bomb would have missed the girl's school, the school shooter would stay home and ask for help, the one we loved one would still be alive. Instead, God weeps with us... And then God calls us to the tomb. Not to accept our new realit... not to decorate it with flowers.

But to roll away the stone.

Jesus needs us to stand in the stench of what has died, and to hear Jesus call life out of places we have written off... To unbind what death has tried to claim. God may feel late, but God is never done.

The power unleashed that day was remarkable. As the word spread about Lazarus, the movement to eliminate Jesus gets stronger. Resurrection disrupts the world as it is. Unbounded hope is dangerous. When God is "late," it is not because God doesn't care. Our God is preparing a liberation that will shake the foundations.

For everyone who is waiting for God to show up— in a devastating diagnosis, in a broken relationship, in a world that feels like it is unraveling before our eyes—remember this: God may not arrive on your timeline. But God always arrives. In the sight of our grief, God weeps. Then God calls life out of death and invites us to unbind what has been resurrected.

Jesus, the Resurrection and Life, will come. The God who seems late is the God who refuses to let death have the last word.

Thanks be to the One who calls us into New Life. Amen

Your strength may fail but the hand of god never will