

## **“Too Late, but Right on Time”**

Liturgical Date: Lent 5 (A)

Primary Text: St. John 11:1-45

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Fifth Sunday in Lent, is the Gospel Lesson from St. John 11. The title of the sermon is “Too Late, but Right on Time”. This passage of Scripture is rich with both drama and spiritual truth and indeed there are many lessons that we may learn from it. Jesus’ friend Lazarus is sick and dying, but Jesus takes His time in arriving to see him, and Lazarus dies. Mary and Martha were confused as to why He waited so long as they knew that the Lord could heal their brother. In spite of this, they both show a resolute faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. WHILE TO HUMAN OBSERVATION GOD MAY NOT ACT RIGHT WHEN WE THINK HE SHOULD, JESUS ARRIVES ON HIS DIVINE SCHEDULE SO THAT HE MAY BRING FORTH LIFE THROUGH HIS WORD.

Location, location, location: this is a fundamental truth of real estate as it has much to do with the value of property. Location plays a key role in the account of the resurrection of Lazarus. Theologians often divide the Gospel of John into two parts: chapters 1-11 being called the “Book of Signs” and chapters 12-21 the “Book of the Passion.” The raising of Lazarus forms the break between these two portions. The Book of Signs contains 7 major signs or miracles, showing that Jesus is the Son of God and the raising of Lazarus, this 7<sup>th</sup> sign, is perhaps the most dramatic miracle of all except for the resurrection of Jesus Himself. Only John records the raising of Lazarus for us.

Jesus' location is not directly near Lazarus when He receives the word that His friend is very ill. He and the 12 Disciples are across the Jordan in Perea. Could he have made it to Lazarus before he died? While not in the immediate area, He was about 18 miles from Bethany, which would could be done in a day's journey if He traveled quickly. But He takes His time. Verse 6 tells us he stayed in His location for two more days before leaving for Bethany. Even when He does go, the disciples are scared as the religious authorities are becoming more aggressive in their attempts to silence Jesus. Thomas even says when Jesus tells them that they are going, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*" (v 16) When Jesus does set out for Bethany, He takes His time. As he draws closer, Martha hurries to meet Him. After their encounter, Jesus still does not rush to the tomb of Lazarus. Martha has time to go back home to her sister Mary, who then has time to also meet Jesus before they go to the location of Lazarus' burial.

Is this coldness on the part of Jesus? Certainly not. WHILE TO HUMAN OBSERVATION GOD MAY NOT ACT RIGHT WHEN WE THINK HE SHOULD, JESUS ARRIVES ON HIS DIVINE SCHEDULE SO THAT HE MAY BRING FORTH LIFE THROUGH HIS WORD. Jesus would be in the right location, at the right time to show the glory of God through a dramatic miracle. Mary and Martha are confused about what took Him so long, but express a deep faith in Jesus. Martha and Mary both tell Jesus, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" But Martha confesses that she knows that her brother will rise again to life on the Last Day and that Jesus is the Christ. Mary fell at his feet. Jesus weeps (v 35). He weeps not for Lazarus, as He knows that He will soon be resurrected, but weeps at the sight of His two faithful disciples in the deep grief of those who have lost a loved one and are attempting to understand

how the Lord allowed this to happen. To them it looks like Jesus was too late, but He was right on time.

When Jesus arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone in front of it, a crowd has gathered. Some scoff and question saying, *“Could not he opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”* (v 37) But Jesus is now in the divinely appointed location at the divinely appointed time. He says, “take away the stone.” The thought of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is not in the mind of Mary. Perhaps she thought that the weeping Jesus simply wanted to see His friend’s body. She protests by bringing up the unpleasant odor that awaited them. I like how the King James translates this, *“Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead for four days.”*

Maybe they should have been prepared for Jesus raising the dead. He had done it before. The Gospels record two other cases: the son of the widow of Nain and the daughter of Jairus. Each time Jesus raised someone from the dead, it became more public and dramatic. In both cases He comforts people by telling them to “weep not”. With the son of the widow of Nain He saw the body being carried and then commands the young man to arise. To the people that witnessed this, it was spontaneous with little build-up. In the case of the daughter of Jairus there is a little more drama. Jesus receives word that this ruler’s daughter is ill. But he does not go to the home until after He heals the woman with the issue of blood. By this time, the 12 year-old girl is dead. He goes anyway and to astonishment of the Jairus and the mourners gathered there tells them to “weep not” because she is only sleeping, and then commands her to rise and she does.

Now we are in Bethany, and again location and timing are important. Jesus is nearing the end of His earthly ministry. Bethany is only 2 miles

from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life and the location of our Lord's own death and resurrection. Lazarus had been dead for 4 days and huge crowd of mourners and on-lookers are assembled. Some Jews believed that the spirit of the departed hovered over the body for three days. This is day four so there is no question that Lazarus is dead-very dead. We don't know anything about Lazarus except that he was the brother of Mary and Martha, a friend of Jesus, and that the Sanhedrin also wanted him dead after this miracle. But that is all we need to know. It is not anything that Lazarus has done that causes him to be raised but what God is about to do. This dead man is about to experience the life-giving power of the Word of God.

Jesus looks up to heaven in a posture of prayer and speaks to His Father. He has proclaimed throughout John that He is the Son of God, and He now speaks to His Father and this will be a sign for all those gathered to believe that He is who He said He is. The words leave the Lord's mouth, "*Lazarus, come out*" or also translated "*Lazarus, come forth!*" (v 43)

The words of Jesus cut through the icy grip of death like a white-hot blade through soft powdered snow. The same Word that brought life in the beginning breathed life into the decomposing corpse of Lazarus. Suddenly, from the blackened shadow of the tomb appeared a figure wrapped in cloth. As he stood at the entrance of the tomb, his face and body were covered with grave clothes. God took him by the hand and led him to the light. What a picture of what is before us! The hour is coming when those who are in their graves will hear His voice. The victory Lazarus had over death was bad news for the devil and the undertaker, but it was only a temporary triumph, for the undertaker would eventually be called back for the physical body of Lazarus in the future. Lazarus would ultimately depart from this earth in physical death, but the time is coming when death shall be no more.

On that day, we will exchange these vile, perishing bodies for incorruptible bodies that will never feel pain, disease, or death. 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 proclaims, *“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’”*

For those who trust in Jesus, this body is but a chrysalis, which may become wrinkled and crusty with age, but it is just a shell that will be discarded as the new butterfly emerges. The Word of God has brought us to new life. By grace, through faith we are saved and pass from the death that has been brought by the condemnation of the law to eternal life through Jesus Christ. Jesus has called us to live eternally. Through His death and resurrection we are no longer dead to sin, but alive in Christ. As Jesus assures us in verses 25-26, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.