

John 11:1-45
09 March 14

“Martha”

It all started when my brother Lazarus fell ill. It soon became clear that the illness was serious, so Mary and I sent word to Jesus that he was needed immediately. Lazarus is also one of Jesus’ followers, and it seemed to us that he and Jesus had become pretty good friends. So we sent word about his illness expecting that Jesus would come pretty soon. We were confident about that and also confident that Jesus could heal Lazarus. We had heard about so many healing Jesus had done, and we had seen a few with our very eyes.

So we sent word in hope. But our hopes were dashed. For whatever reason, Jesus did not come. We waited and waited. Lazarus went from bad to worse. But still Jesus did not come. And then the worst happened. Our brother Lazarus died. As is our custom. We buried him before sunset. And then the mourning began. Relatives, friends, fellow villagers came to cry and to wail with us. It was a hard loss. Lazarus was our only brother. And now he was gone.

About four days after Lazarus had died, Jesus finally arrived. I was more than a little glad to see him. Our mourning would not be complete without him. And yet I couldn’t help but think that things might have been different, that my brother might still be alive, if he had come sooner. When I saw him I said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” I suppose I said it with some edge in my voice. One part of me was glad to see Jesus. Another part of me was angry that this thing had happened to my brother and that Jesus had not prevented it. And yet another part of me held out some strange hope for the future. So I also said to Jesus, “Even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”

Jesus spoke to me of our hope for the resurrection, and I said, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” And then Jesus said something strange to me. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will never die.” And he asked me if I believed that what he had said was true, and I said, “Yes, Lord, I believe. I believe that you are the Messiah, the son of God.” Even then I believed, though exactly what I believed I’m not sure.

Jesus had spoken words of comfort and words of hope. At the time I had misunderstood him. I thought he had come to mourn with us and to comfort us. I thought he was talking about the resurrection on the last day. How could I have known he had something else in mind?

Well, I went to fetch my sister Mary, and when she heard that Jesus had arrived she ran to greet him. But she, too, she who had sat at his feet while I worked in the kitchen also said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” I will never forget seeing my sister kneel at Jesus’ feet with tears streaming down her cheeks as she looked up to him and cried, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Jesus was affected, too. Overcome by the moment, he, too, began to weep openly. We called him Lord—and still do, for that is what he is, our Lord. But at that moment he seemed so weak, so

vulnerable, so human—not unlike how he appeared as he hung on his cross.

Jesus began to weep. But the wailing was soon turned to dancing. Jesus asked that the stone in front of Lazarus' grave be set aside. We told him it had been four days since Lazarus had died, but he didn't seem to care about that. He insisted that the stone be moved. And when it had, he prayed to the heavenly Father a prayer of thanksgiving. Imagine that! a prayer of thanksgiving in the midst of our wailing and crying! And then with a loud voice he commanded, "Lazarus, come out!"

And to our utter amazement, Lazarus did come out! Our friend, our brother whom we had seen slip away from us into death, whom with our own eyes we had seen buried, walked right out of that tomb! Back into our lives! Back into our arms! Now I understood what Jesus had meant when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Now I understood what *I* meant when I had said, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the son of God."

I've heard others speak about feeling like they had born again. They meant it in a figurative sense. I saw it in a literal sense. I saw my brother who was dead given back to us alive.

When Lazarus came out of the tomb he still had the bands of death in which we had buried him wrapped around him. I had seen death, and I knew that I would see it again. Even in my joy at seeing my brother alive again I knew that those bands would someday be wrapped around him again.

I don't know why I remembered those burial cloths. But I found out what it meant on the day Jesus rose from the dead. His rising was not like that of my brother Lazarus. For when I looked into the tomb where Jesus had been laid I saw the bands of death neatly folded and wrapped and set aside. The bands of death were no longer on Jesus. He would not die again. And those of us who know him as our Lord, who eat of the meal he gives us and partake of his body and blood, we will never really die. That is what he promised me. And now I understand what he meant.

I hope you understand as well. For I have found that knowing that the word of death is not God's final word to me frees me from having to worry about myself, frees me to love, frees me to live.