

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

Jesus is with his disciples when he gets word that his friend Lazarus is ill. Mary and Martha, his sisters, send word, expecting Jesus to come to be with them. Jesus is a friend; he has been in their home, shared stories, and meals while teaching and preaching, and Jesus has become a man in the inner circle of their lives. There are many themes in this Bible passage, and here I would like to point to Jesus's friendship with Lazarus and his family—"he whom you love is ill".

We might imagine that when word was sent to Jesus, he would come right away—it was his friends who were asking. But he does not come right away. It would have been dangerous to go to Bethany – the last time he was there he was run out of town and threatened to be stoned. The Bible text plunges us into waiting, Jesus seems to be saying time is not time, but it is God's time. Sometimes we need to be reminded about this is "God's time" - but it feels as though Jesus has missed the mark, and arrives too late... We linger with the grief of Mary and Martha and Jesus's own grief.

In the Gospel of John this is the last sign of the miracles, not just water into wine or abundant bread, but life itself. This life is life with Christ. Lazarus will die because he is human, and Jesus too will turn toward Jerusalem and be killed. Death here, and

always—is accompanied by grief and tears. When Jesus weeps he accompanies us in our own grief and sorrow. Mary and Martha and the community express that grief differently. Perhaps, in this moment, Jesus longs not to face death and also weeps for the world.



When the miracle of life happens and Jesus calls out to Lazarus. John wants us to know that life with Jesus is an abundant life. It is the friends of Lazarus that unbind him from the burial cloths. Lazarus will now be the beloved friend who is with Jesus, accompanying him to death and witnessing the resurrection. From the darkness of the toward the Light of Christ Lazarus walks toward Jesus. In this scripture we are reminded that we cannot unbind ourselves. To walk toward the Light is to also walk in community.

The Raising of Lazarus, etching by Rembrandt – 1642
Lazarus here is bathed in light as he is raised up in this etching.

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