

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ 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.” (John 11:32-44 NIV2011)

From Death to Life

It had only been four days; four days that I’m sure felt like an eternity. It was especially hard whenever she wanted to share an inside joke and he wasn’t there. It was just strange not seeing him around the house. The place in her heart where she held him now held a massive hole. She looked back at the memories; she would always cherish them. She remembered the stories they shared, the time together, and even the hard times when they didn’t get along. But that’s all she had now. She was in the middle looking back at memories....the past...remembering when...while looking ahead to a future without him.

At the same time she looked further ahead. She knew he was in a better place. He wasn’t sick anymore. There wouldn’t be any more of that pain for him. She wouldn’t have to watch him fade and get worse. He was with the Lord in heaven. That was good, great. She still missed him, though. She still would have loved to spend another day with him. She wasn’t being selfish—she loved him. Lazarus was her brother and now he is gone. But there was nothing she could do about it. Death is final.

Martha lets her know that Jesus was there looking for her so Mary goes out to him. When she sees Jesus she falls at his feet and says, “**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**” Maybe there is a little resentment. Maybe she’s a little upset with Jesus. At the same, it’s the simple truth: if Jesus had been there earlier, Jesus could have

saved him. Lazarus would not have died. Her brother would still be alive. But now he is dead. It's too late, Jesus. After all, death is final.

Most of us know what Mary is feeling. It was someone you loved or cared about. It was someone who was near and dear to you. They had touched your life in some way. You had a place with their name on it in your heart. And now they are gone. The little comments just aren't the same sharing them with someone else. The house feels a little emptier and it's not just because they aren't physically present. The birthday cards she always sent no longer show up in the mail. His laughter no longer fills the room. You might find yourself picking up the phone to call him only to realize what you are doing. Her reassuring presence and support is gone. She's not looking out for you above. He's not there watching over you. They are gone. Death is final.

If they were a Christian, you know they are in a better place. You know that Jesus died for them and rose again. You know they have a home in heaven that is better and greater than anything here on this earth. You know it. Jesus promised it. You believe it. You still miss them. You have the memories. You remember when as you look back at the time you had together. You are thankful for it. But you are still here and they are not. Like Mary we might say or think, "If only Jesus had taken that sickness away...if only he would have stopped that accident from happening...if only he had done something, they would still be here." Sometimes it's out of resentment. Other times it's wrestling with God's plan and trying to understand his will. Sometimes it's wishful thinking. Other times it's simply a statement of fact. You know it won't change the reality that the person you loved and cared about is no longer with you. You are stuck in the middle between past memories and a future without them.

Jesus knows what you are feeling too. It's not only because he is all-knowing reading our hearts and minds like an open book. He knows what you are feeling because he felt it too. He sees the tears rolling down Mary's cheeks. He hears and feels her cries. He sees the people trying to console and support her the best they know how. He sees and hears them too. And John writes, "**Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.**"

Sometimes it's hard to put into words what we are feeling in our hearts. When you see certain people hurting and crying, you can't help but feel the same way. Your heart aches with them. You start crying because they are too. There's this anger and frustration we have with death, Jesus feels that too. When they take him to Lazarus' tomb and he sees where his friend who he loved now rests. "**Jesus wept.**" There's no holding back the genuine tears of sympathy and care as they fall from our Savior's face. When he takes on your flesh and blood, he really did share in all of our weaknesses including feeling this pain at death. Even when he knows what he is going to do, Jesus wept. This was not what

God created the crown of his creation to do. He created man to live. Here at the tomb is the consequence and result of sin: death. Jesus wept.

The people can't quite decide to make of all this. Some see Jesus' love for Lazarus, his friend. Others point the finger of blame, "**Couldn't he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?**" If only Jesus had done something! But now Lazarus is dead. It's too late. After all, death is final.

Outside of all the violence, the fighting, the arguing, and the corruption we see, the one thing that reminds us above all else that all is not well in this world is death. We don't like thinking about it. We don't want to talk about it. Billions of dollars are spent on science and technology to try and push it off. But even with all of the advancements and care Psalm 90 still rings true: "**The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength.**" We say things like, "They passed away...they're no longer with us...we lost them..." to try and avoid saying what it really is: he died. She died. Death is that constant reminder of who we are and what is waiting for us. The psalmist asks: "**What man can lie and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?**" (Psalm 89:48). We see it enough and know it: death isn't picky about who will join him. Whether 95 years old or a baby in the womb, full of health, extremely sick, or somewhere in between, unless Christ returns first, death comes to all, because all sinned (Romans 5:12). Even when we know what waits for us we don't like the thought of death. Christians want to get to heaven. We want to be with Jesus! But we don't want to go through dying and death to get there. For those without saving faith, death is terrifying and even more crippling because it is so final. It's the end. The only thing they have is the past and a wishful thought that their memory will live after them. Or so they tell themselves.

Thanks be to God we are not like those who grieve without hope. When Jesus comes to the entrance where they buried the dead body he tells them, "**Take away the stone.**" Martha doesn't think that's such a good idea. The body has already been decomposing and is sure that it's going to stink. But Jesus encourages Mary, "**Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?**" (v.40)." He could have blasted the stone away with his own power, instead he allows these other people to join in this work. Jesus prays to his Father so that all might know who had sent Jesus and answered Jesus' prayer. Then in a loud voice Jesus calls out, "**Lazarus, come out!**" And what happens? How eerie that must have been. The dead man who had been in the tomb for four days walks out of the tomb still wrapped in burial clothes and cloth around his face from death to life. Death has no power here when the Lord of life calls.

That's what Jesus did for you and me too. For us born dead in sin he called out through his Word and raised us from death to life. It happened there at the baptismal font. Marked with the cross on your head and heart you died with Jesus in those waters and he raised you

from death to life. Satan screamed as you were ripped from his hands and God declared you his own child. The angels rejoiced because one who was dead now lives. The power of sin, God's law that convicts and kills us, has been removed. Jesus carried that burden for you, became a curse for us, was punished and died in your place. The sting of death that is sin has been taken out. Jesus lives. Thanks be to God he gives us the victory through our Savior Jesus Christ. Death has no power here at Lazarus' tomb because death would have no power at Jesus' tomb. It could not chain down the Lord of life—death has been swallowed up in victory! He is the resurrection and life who promises that all who believe in him have eternal life. This isn't just something we look forward to in the future. You have this today. You already died with Jesus in your baptism. You were already raised with him from the waters. We aren't stuck in the middle waiting; you have life today. Life without the stench of the guilt of sin; Jesus blood has washed you clean. You are God's holy one. A saint. Life without terror of the grave; Jesus lives and baptismal waters cover you. Death is not the end for you, dear child of God. It's the dark valley that our Good Shepherd leads us through to bring us to him. We are not stuck in the middle, we press on with our eyes on the prize of eternal life that was won for you with Jesus' blood and righteousness already yours through faith. We get to roll away the stones in other people's lives removing the obstacles with the good news that death is not the end. We partake in the heavenly banquet of the Lord's Supper along with the saints in heaven that strengthens us as we continue on our way. Yes, one day, unless Jesus returns first, we will take our last breath in this world. We will close our eyes one final time. Then we will open them again and see our Savior Jesus waiting with the crown of life that he will place on your head and his glorious dress to place on your shoulders. Even that's not the end. One day, Jesus will return. At that time we will hear him call out with a loud voice and it will be us who burst forth from our graves. We will be raised and we will all be changed. In our own flesh made perfect and our own two eyes we will see our Redeemer lives. And we will be with the Lord forever.

Until that day, we thank our Lord that he keeps his promise to work through Word and Sacrament to keep his people in the one true faith until life everlasting—whether that's the 95 year old or the baby in the womb. We remember those who have gone before us—sinners like you and me who were washed with the blood of Lamb and declared God's holy ones: saints. We rejoice that he has wiped every tear from their eyes and removed their disgrace. They reign with Christ, triumphant and victorious. They are with Jesus. And one day we will too because Jesus lives. Amen.