

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – July 20, 2018
Gospel According to St. John – Third Year

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Entering Into Scripture: A Meditation on the Death of Lazarus

It is my favorite time of day. Dawn. The sun isn't up just yet, but the sky is clear and washed with that deep morning blue punctuated by those last fading morning stars. The air is cool and refreshing. Creation slowly rises from her slumber. Nothing moves except a bird here and there; their song a happy one today. I am up early – well before my companions. For some

reason I can't sleep. So I roused myself and shuffled down here to the river.

Upstream a rock bed agitates the river just enough to incite the quiet chant of burbling waters. What is it about that sound that is so soothing to my soul? It is a welcomed balm to my anxious thoughts.

The Gospel of St. John

Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

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We have made this our camp for the past couple months since leaving Jerusalem. This little bluff sits above where a small stream meets the Jordan River. It is called Bethany, but sometimes referred to as Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan to distinguish it from the village of Bethany which is just outside of Jerusalem. I know this place well, although I haven't been here in a few years. I feel safe here, far away from those blood-thirsty Judeans and the Pharisees who hate Jesus so much. This place is laced with memories and meaning for me. It is here that John the Baptizer first began to call us to repentance and where I was baptized. It is also here that Jesus was baptized by John. So much has happened since then. It has all gone by so quickly.

I think of John. I am pained by the memory of his execution by Herod. I think of the last time I was here. I left this place to follow Jesus, who John called the "Lamb of God." I recall my first days with Jesus. Hanging out in Capernaum. The wedding in Cana. The healing of the Royal Official's son. The healing of the invalid by the pool. More recently, the healing of the man born blind. The ascending hatred of the Pharisees towards us.

Some of the things Jesus had said echo in my mind as these various scenes flash across my inner eyes: "I am the Good Shepherd." "I am the gate – whoever enters through Me will be saved." "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty." "My Father and I are One."

Light and life. What could be better? Yet I am stirred to trouble deep in my soul. The Pharisees tried to stone Jesus to death last time we were in Jerusalem. We barely managed to escape. In a month will be Passover, and we will have to go back there again. I am filled with dread at the thought.

A few feet away a beaver swims up-stream. His cheerful face breaks my gloom and brings a smile

to me. I hear the waters once again and for a moment, all seems well with the world.

Climbing the bluff, I return to camp where breakfast prep is underway. It won't be long before this place is filled with pilgrims coming to see and hear and Jesus. There is no down-time, apart from these early morning respites. No time to think or reflect.

And just like that we are no longer alone but joined by the first of what will be a growing throng of visitors from all parts. Some have questions. Some will come bearing requests for themselves or on behalf of a loved-one. Some are merely curious. Every day it is different, and yet, every day is the same.

"Lord, the one You love is sick." The words arc with urgency. This can't be good. I turn in the direction of the voice. It is a familiar voice. He hails from the other Bethany. He is a close friend of the family with whom we often stay when we go to Jerusalem. I wonder which one? Is it Martha? Mary? Or their brother?

"Lazarus?" Peter asks.

A nod of the head confirms it. "His sisters sent me to bring word to You," he said looking to Jesus.

"This sickness will not end in death," Jesus assured him. "No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

A sense of relief washes over us all. Lazarus will be okay. Our visitor appears to accept Him at His word. No reason to be alarmed, I think. And I go back to my chores.

The day passed as I might have imagined. Visitors flooded our little perch from all parts of Israel – the country to north near Galilee, some from Jerusalem, others from the surrounding countryside. Many put their faith on Jesus. The time passes quickly and soon the sun seems to collapse in exhaustion like me. I didn't think about Lazarus or the other Bethany again today. And there was no discussion about him tonight or at all during the following day either.

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After two days, as we were finishing breakfast, Jesus surprised us all. "Let's go back to Judea," He said.

I was stunned. "No way," said one. "Are You kidding?" asked another. A third simply asked, "Why?" "The Jews there tried to stone You just a month ago," I said, putting voice to what everyone of us was thinking. It is dangerous to go there. Dangerous and reckless. Seldom had I felt all of us so united in opposition to His proposal as we are right now.

Jesus sensed our reluctance. As if to assure us that all would be okay He said, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light."

He paused as His words fell upon us and we seemed to drink them in. Then He added, "It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

I took it to mean that although there is danger ahead, we will be okay this time. His words are reassuring, but my anxiety remains.

Jesus then says, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

"If he is just sleeping let him rouse himself when he recovers." The words just blurted out of me before I could think about what I was saying.

"Lazarus is dead," Jesus said crisply. "And for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe."

His words pierce me. Dead? Lazarus is dead? How can that be? How could You let that happen, Lord? My heart breaks for Martha and for Mary. The two sisters are so kind to us and I

feel so loved by them and by Lazarus. I am simply stunned. How could he be dead?

"Now let us go to him," Jesus implores, and He turns to descend the bluff in the direction of the up-stream ford.

Thomas is the first to fall in behind Him and make way across the river. He turns and calls back to the rest of us, still frozen on the bluff, "Come on. Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

His words are jarring. Lazarus is dead. And my own death may await me in Judea. Do we really have to go back there? I am torn. I so want to console the sisters, and I so want to save my own skin. What choice do I have? Where else would I go?

No one speaks. Each is caught-up in the privacy of his own thoughts. Peter, James and John all seem to go at the same moment. They descend the bluff and walk towards the ford to cross over and follow Jesus. Others fall in behind them. I am the last to move.

Bethany is a two-day journey from here. Then it hits me. News of Lazarus reached us two days ago. Jesus was in no hurry to go. Now we are making way. What gives? Couldn't Lazarus have been healed just because Jesus said the word? Now he is dead? Why? Didn't He say this sickness wouldn't end in death?

The words Jesus spoke earlier ring out in my head – "it is for your sake that I am glad I wasn't there..." What the heck does that mean?

Picking my way across the Jordan, I am a swirl of confusion and fear. As we go back into the lion's den, all I can think to myself is, "Jesus – I love You and I trust You, but I sure hope You know what You are doing."

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Reflection 1: Glorified

You do not speak to Lazarus' sickness in terms of death, but rather in terms of glorification – his sickness will glorify Your Father and will glorify You. Something about passing through the veil of death releases God's glory and brings glorification to You and Your Father. Later on, when You are betrayed, You say, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" Elsewhere, the Gospel writer says "*Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about Him.*" We might

see death as a final fatal tragedy of the human condition – the end of ends. But You never see it that way. You see death as the pinnacle of glory. With increasing clarity, You connect Your highest purpose and utmost glory to the Cross. Within the mystery of human death, the fullest expression of God's love and mercy powerfully meets human weakness and fragility and raises human life to new glory. This is the hope we have in You.

Application: How have I experienced finding deeper faith in Jesus through suffering, illness or loss?

Reflection 2: Equipping and Preparing

There are two things in play here, Lord, and we should not miss either. When You say plainly that Lazarus is dead, You say something more. You are glad for the sake of Your companions that it is so. Why are You glad for the disciples that Lazarus has died? Is it that You are imparting to them new light for the darkness which is coming? You are using this circumstance to equip and prepare Your followers for a time which is coming when they will draw strength from the very thing they cannot yet imagine. Previously You have

revealed Yourself as Light. Then You revealed Yourself as Life. And when You come to Bethany to the tomb of Lazarus You will reveal Yourself as Resurrection. Just now, the disciples cannot fathom Your power over death. They are dialed into the danger in Judea – but do not yet know the power of God to meet that danger head-on in a way that releases glorification for both You and Your Father. Here You are equipping and preparing them for what lay ahead. Such is Your all-encompassing care for us!

Application: In what ways has I experienced God's generous equipping and preparations in my life?