

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 30 March 2025

Sermon Title : Jesus: The Stories - The Raising

Speaker : Rev Shannon Chan

Text : John 11:1-44

INTRODUCTION

We continue with the sermon series on the stories of Jesus about what we might call miracles, like the turning of water into wine, the feeding of the 5000, the healing of the paralytic and the stilling of the storm. What we may call miracles, John calls signs to focus our attention on Jesus and also serve as evidence that Jesus truly is God in the flesh. Bringing Lazarus back to life is only found in John's Gospel. It is the 7th and last major sign in the Gospel of John and it is the dramatic climax of Jesus' miracles (at least for those that were recorded). What could possibly surpass bringing someone back from being dead after 4 days? In the King James version, after 4 days it talks about the state of decomposition of the body and it reads, the body 'stinketh'.

There are 3 lessons we can learn in journeying to the amazing climax of Lazarus' story

In the face of death:

1) We see the God of courage (vv.1-10, 16)

These events began in the village of Bethany (city of Judea), which is about 3.2 km east of Jerusalem. Lazarus was sick, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word about his sickness to Jesus who was in Jerusalem. When Jesus told His disciples that they were to go back to Bethany together to wake Lazarus up, the disciples failed to understand that Jesus had used the word "asleep" as a euphemism for death. After Jesus told them plainly that Lazarus had died, they were perhaps afraid for their safety as the Jews there had previously tried to stone Jesus. After all, they had been seen as Jesus' disciples. Also, there were some cryptic comments by Thomas, "Let us go back to die with him."

- Jesus' answer to them in vv.9-10, shows that in the face of personal danger of death to Himself, the God of courage was saying He could safely return to Bethany for He was walking in the light according to His Father's will and doing the Father's will. Therefore, no harm would befall Him until the Father's appointed hour.

Henry Alford puts it this way: "*I have a fixed time during which to work, appointed me by my Father; during that time I feel no danger, I walk in His light, even as the traveller in the light of this world by day.*"

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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Likewise, if anyone walks in the light of God's will, that person will not stumble, no matter how many snares and traps were placed in the way. Conversely, if someone were to walk at night in the darkness against God's will, if that person undertakes God's work at the wrong time, in the wrong way, or without God's true call to undertake it, or without the right motive, if he/she does not have true light from God through His Word and by His Spirit, and if God no longer protects him/her. Then that person needs to and can justly be afraid of the danger which he/she exposes self. For when there is no light in them and in the situation, the person would fall into error, sin and misery.

2) We see the God who delays (vv.11-15, 17-32)

Even after hearing of Lazarus's illness, Jesus stayed where He was for 2 more days (verse 6). By the time Jesus reached Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead for 4 days. This delay seemed to contradict what was recorded in verse 5 that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus individually and personally, as they were named. It begged the question of why did Jesus not leave immediately and go to Bethany if He loved them so much? Delay seems something someone might do if they do not really love you, or it seems like they do not really care for you? Yet, we know Jesus loved them and He still delayed.

- God's delays do not mean that He does not love us or does not hear us.
It can be painfully agonising to wait for God to bring to pass His perfect will in our lives, but this waiting time often reveals where we are in our trust towards Him.
- The purposes of God in contrast to the purposes of humankind.
A pastor suggests that there are things in our lives that appear negative from the vantage point of man but these events are not designed to be the end of us. They are designed by God to bring glory to His name even if we do not see how.

We need to guard against rushing into things and pushing for our way, trying to outmanoeuvre God or trying to manipulate situations or people. Another pastor puts it, "*With God, a waiting season is never a wasted season.*"

Maybe God wants to do something in us, and maybe He wants us to change before He does something for us. From the perspective of Christian formation, Adele Calhoun further suggests, "*Waiting is God's crucible for transformation. Waiting is how God gets at the idols of our heart. Waiting addresses the things we (want) besides God to be content: money, comfort, experience, success or control.*"

Therefore, instead of raising self-centred demands of wanting this and that, even though some of them may be good things, can we declare, "God, you don't have to do what I want. Still, I will trust in You, that Your will is best for me." In doing so, we may come to realize that God's delay has become the setting for His greatest miracle, as we saw in Lazarus's story. That waiting for God's 'perfect when' is used by God to reveal His goodness, His plans for us beyond our greatest expectations.

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3) We see the God who weeps (vv.33-44)

- Jesus was staring death face to face. He was seeing the effects of sin. Words were not enough to convey how terribly bad death is. Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled (v.33) A translation puts it that “*Jesus shuddered with feelings of indignation against death*”. In v.35 He asked to go to the tomb and there He shed quiet tears of sorrow.

There is eternity after death whether we choose to believe it or not. So, every person needs to ask in this life, what hope they have beyond the grave and come to terms with it in this life. Some may have decided that they do not need hope, or that hope is an illusion. Jesus offers so much more. He wept at the sight of death, but He does more than just weep. This story is not just about Lazarus, for this story ultimately points to Jesus. The events that unfolded led up to Jesus’s own death and after this story, we see the leaders plotting His death. However, Jesus was able to face His own death because He Himself was The Resurrection and The Life. Jesus’ story was about His power over death. It is about His glory and what happens to those of us who put our faith and trust in Him. We gain victory over death when we choose to enter into relationship with the One who is The Resurrection and The Life.

“The central thought of St. John’s Gospel is “The Word was made flesh,” and He is for us the Resurrection and the Life, because He has been manifested to us, not as an abstraction which the intellect only could receive, but He comes as a person, living a human life, and knowing its sorrows, in whom the heart can grasp and love...God in tears..His glory shining through His human tears.”
- Ellicott

In the face of death, we see the weeping face of God.

CONCLUSION

In these troubled times, may we be a source of hope to the world, by telling those around us that when we weep for the death and tragedies, it is our Lord who weeps with us. Further to that, He can and wants to set us free from sin, death and the brokenness of this world.

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A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Take some time to visualise yourselves as:

- Martha or Mary; after sending word to Jesus that Lazarus is sick, and Jesus did not come till Lazarus had died for 4 days. How would you feel, say and act?
- Thomas; upon hearing Jesus's intention to return to Bethany. How would you feel, say and act?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. Recall a similar situation in your life that caused you to feel like how Martha/Mary or Thomas felt in Question 2 above.
- (i) What were the desires of your heart at that time?
 - (ii) Where were you in your trust towards Jesus?
 - (iii) What do you think God wanted to do in your life at that time?
- 3b. Appoint someone to read John 11:1-44. With reference to this passage and sermon, how would you minister to someone:
- (i) who feels that Jesus does not love him/her because He has not acted the way he/she wants Him to?
 - (ii) who is facing death?
- 4a. Recount a time when, driven by worldly purposes instead of Godly purposes, you either:
- (i) became impatient with God and wanted to speed things along, or undertake God's work not in God's time, or
 - (ii) undertake God's work in the wrong way or without God's true call to undertake it, or
 - (iii) undertake God's work without the right motive from God through His Word and by His Spirit,
- How did you feel and what was the outcome?
- 4b. What is one thing you can change to curb the temptation of resisting God's will and timing in your life?
- 4c. How can your group members encourage or help you to achieve 4b above in the following week(s), till your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your testimony on an occasion where God's perfect timing enabled events in your life to fall into place and His purpose of growing your trust in Him fulfilled.

OR

Give thanks to God for being the tender King of Kings, weeping alongside us in the face of death, and for the victory we gain over death when we choose to enter into relationship with Jesus, who is The Resurrection and The Life, when we put our faith and trust in Him.

6. Take time to pray for each other and seek the Lord on how you can courageously trust God's purpose which contrasts with the purpose of humankind, to be a source of hope and bring glory to His name, even if it means waiting and giving up self-centred demands.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. Nothing is Impossible – Planetshakers
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm0O_1Xqn5o&ab_channel=planetshakerstv
2. Living Hope - Phil Wickham
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f2FXxDVO6w&ab_channel=musicmeetsheaven
3. I Surrender – Hillsong
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HbpTi8dIB8&ab_channel=HillsongWorship

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