

*“Lazarus, come out!”*

The high point of this Scripture comes after Jesus had the stone rolled away from the entrance to Lazarus’ tomb and then commanded, *“Lazarus, come out!”* If you and I are to fully understand the importance both of those words and of the way the fulfillment of those words affects a number of relationships, then we need to first examine the dynamics of those relationships and what was at stake for those in them.

**First, Jesus had a very close and loving relationship with Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus.**

**Second, Jesus had a special relationship with his twelve male disciples. Third, among the general populace were folks, who were either followers or inquirers or doubters of Jesus.**

**Fourth, there is a unique relationship between Jesus and God.**

**Fifth and finally, was the adversarial relationship between Jesus and the religious elite of the Jewish community.**

The close and loving relationship with the family of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus by Jesus is something of a mystery. Only the Gospel of John gives us a glimpse of their relationship. The Gospel of Luke shares something of the dynamic between Mary and Martha as it reports how Jesus taught in their home and Martha was upset because Mary sat and listened to Jesus, instead of sharing the hosting chores. However, Luke does not mention they had a brother named Lazarus. The author of the Gospel of John explains in today’s Reading that Mary was the *“one who poured the perfume on the Lord’s feet and wiped them with her hair”*.

Early in the Scripture, John explains, *“The sisters sent Jesus a message: ‘Lord, your dear friend is sick.’”* The Reading confirms, *“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”* John also made it clear Jesus intentionally delayed going to the aid of Lazarus, so it is no surprise how both of the sisters were very upset when Jesus arrived at least four days after their brother was dead. We are told, *“Martha said to Jesus, ‘If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died! But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask Him for.’”* Since John noted Mary did not go out to meet Jesus until Martha went back to her and told Mary he was asking for her, it seems Mary was angrier at Jesus than Martha. Although, the Scripture explains, *“Mary arrived where Jesus was, and as soon as she saw him, she fell at his feet. ‘Lord,’ she said, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died!’”*

Before Martha went back to Mary, she and Jesus had a rather significant theological discussion, *“‘Your brother will rise to life,’ Jesus told her. ‘I know,’ she replied, ‘that he will rise to life on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord!’ she answered. ‘I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’”* Ironically, when Jesus called for the stone, which was covering the entrance to Lazarus’ tomb to be removed, *“Martha, the dead man’s sister, answered, ‘There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!’”* Reminding Martha, *“Jesus said to her, ‘Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believed?’”* Although Martha had earlier told Jesus, *“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for”*, she did not dare to consider Jesus could raise her brother from the dead! Because of the grief and pain coming from their loss and because of their fears of the economic hardships they faced in the future resulting from the death of the male of the household, **Martha and Mary needed Jesus to act on their behalf. After the miracle, Lazarus was a very powerful and living testimony to Jesus’ identity and ability.**

The disciples spent an extraordinary amount of time being with and traveling beside Jesus and they were present as he interacted with the grieving sisters, yet, the twelve were not primary participants in the dialogues with Jesus once they came to Bethany. During Jesus’ public ministry, the disciples were often among the eyewitnesses for his healings, for other miracles, and for his teachings. Unfortunately, they had their own agendas and were frequently slow to realize the difference between the way of life demanded by the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law and the dramatically new and self-giving life Jesus called them and us to live out.

Prior to their arrival in Bethany, the disciples discussed with Jesus why he delayed helping Lazarus. After Jesus received the sisters’ plea for his help he told the disciples, *“The final result of this sickness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory.”*

After Jesus delayed long enough to make sure everyone knew Lazarus was definitely dead, ***“he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea.’”*** His announcement set the stage for the disciples to protest, ***“Teacher, just a short time ago the people there wanted to stone you; and are you planning to go back?”*** After Jesus responded with a brief reference to his being ***“Light for this world”***, he said, ***“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go and wake him up.”*** The disciples sought to twist his words to justify their desire to stay away from Judea and danger. ***“The disciples answered, ‘If he is asleep, Lord, he will get well.’”***

Jesus intended to push his disciples to see going to Lazarus was as an urgent matter. He did not want to announce the death of his good friend but they were literally interpreting his words, ***“So Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead, but for your sake I am glad that I was not with him, so that you will believe. Let us go to him.’”*** **The Raising of Lazarus from the dead was important for the faith of Jesus’ disciples! Otherwise, their view of God and Jesus was too limited.**

Because many people in Jerusalem, as well as, Bethany knew Martha and Mary, they had come to pay their respects following the death of their brother, Lazarus. They followed Mary when she went out to see Jesus. After Mary shared with Jesus her sadness that he did not make it in time to save Lazarus, ***“Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved.”*** Because of his close relationship with Mary, Jesus was emotionally moved, but John indicates he was also emotional because the people were upset.

Indeed, instead of raising Lazarus privately, Jesus did it very publically – in front of this large group of mourners. Jesus took the initiative and asked, ***“Where have you buried him?” ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they answered. Jesus wept. ‘See how much he loved him!’ the people said.”*** Some of the people made their unhappiness with Jesus known because they believed he should have kept Lazarus from dying. John explains, ***“Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance. ‘Take the stone away!’ Jesus ordered.”*** Although Martha sought to stop Jesus from opening the grave of her brother because of the smell, Jesus convinced her to give her consent and he prayed aloud to the Divine Parent in front of the crowd of people. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, ***“Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him.”*** **This public event led many of the witnesses to have faith in Jesus!**

In addition to Jesus’ resurrection of Lazarus having an important impact on his relationships with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, his disciples, and the general public, it also demonstrated an extremely close relationship with the Divine Parent – God. After having the tomb opened and before commanding Lazarus to come out, ***“Jesus looked up and said, ‘I thank You, Father, that You listen to me. I know that You always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that You sent me.’”*** As Jesus indicated in his prayer, the results he anticipated as coming from the raising of Lazarus would be the belief of the eyewitnesses and of many to whom they gave their testimony. **Many would have faith and trust in God because of the Divine Parent’s Love or Glory shown through Jesus’ resurrection of Lazarus.**

After Jesus’ prayer, ***“he called out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and with a cloth around his face. ‘Untie him,’ Jesus told them, ‘and let him go.’”***

When word got back to the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council in Jerusalem, they planned to kill both Jesus and Lazarus! **Lazarus was a target because he was living proof of God’s Power and Glory being with Jesus.** We know what eventually happened to Jesus but, unfortunately, we do not have any Biblical report about the rest of Lazarus’ life.

After considering the impact on Jesus’ relationships with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, the disciples, the crowd of witnesses, the Divine Parent, and his enemies, because Jesus said, ***“Lazarus, come out!”***, we come to ask ourselves, to which relationship do you and I belong? Do you respond like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? Despite your experiences of loss, hardship, fear, and even anger, has Jesus transformed your life into the New Life in Christ – just as he did Lazarus, Martha, and Mary when Jesus declared, ***“Lazarus, come out!”? Be a living testimony of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love, Forgiveness, Acceptance, and Welcome*** by following Lazarus’ example of answering Jesus’ call to **come out of death and to be alive with Christ!** He is our ***“Resurrection and the Life”!*** Amen.