

“Answer the Call!”

This Scripture is about Jesus raising his very close friend Lazarus from the dead. **A description of this event is not found in the Synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Why?** Some scholars have questioned the authenticity of the report of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, since it is not reported in those Synoptic gospels.

Of those three gospels, Luke is the only one to also include a report about Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha. It is found in Luke 10:38-41. I suspect Luke, who was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus, received information about Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, which, instead of being portrayed as a factual description of the raising of Lazarus was either reported to be a parable of Jesus, perhaps, after that resurrection or an early church teaching, so, Luke did not chose to share a hazy report about the resurrection of Lazarus.

Also, only the Gospel of Luke, which acknowledges Jesus had a relationship with Martha and Mary, shares the curious **Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**. That story in Luke 16:19-31 includes the dead rich man in hades requesting the heavenly Father Abraham resurrect the dead beggar Lazarus and, then, send him miraculously back to warn the rich man’s brothers to listen to God’s messengers. However, Jesus concluded the parable saying in Luke 16:31, **“But Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death.’”** Indeed, John’s account reveals the Jewish authorities, not only refused to believe after Jesus raised Lazarus, but, instead, plotted to kill both of them! So, the parable seems to have used some of the details of the event reported in today’s Scripture to satirize the refusal of the religious elite to believe in Jesus, following his raising of Lazarus.

The challenging of John’s description of Lazarus’ resurrection by academicians raises the question, “Why would the authors of the Synoptic gospels not report such an amazing event, if it were true?” Luke, Matthew, and Mark were not inclined to report the resurrection of Lazarus for several important reasons. The overarching explanation is they feared such a report would put Jesus in an unfavorable position. It is argued these Synoptic gospels did, after all, report Jesus brought people back to life, so why would they not tell about Lazarus? However, they do not include any resurrections under such spectacular circumstances and some of the details might encourage or support a diminishing of Jesus’ own resurrection and/or authority.

For example, **Lazarus had not only been dead for more than 4 days, he had been buried for 4 days!** Since the gospels were written after the Resurrection of Jesus, their authors would have been put in the strange position of saying, “although Jesus had only been dead for parts of 3 days before he was raised from the dead, he had brought Lazarus back to life, after he had been buried for 4 days!” How would potential believers or even, then, current followers compare Lazarus to Jesus, given Lazarus’ resurrection seems to demonstrate more of God’s power? Further complications faced the earliest Christians, since Lazarus was still walking among them and Jesus had disappeared – only a few witnessed his ascension!

All four gospels had to contend with the issue of challenges about respective importance because the followers of the dead John the Baptist claimed he was the greater authority, since he baptized Jesus. The Gospel of John does not seem to have as much difficulty with the claims of the Baptizer’s followers. Maybe that is because the author of John was first a disciple of the Baptist and thus, an eyewitness, who was able to faithfully report John the Baptist’s disclosure about his divine revelation connected to his baptizing of Jesus – the Son of God.

Perhaps the three Synoptic gospel writers, were simply too worried about the impact of the scandal of Lazarus’ resurrection because it seemed to be the greater miracle. **The raising of Lazarus was, most likely, not seen as such a great threat to Jesus’ position and authority by the writer of the Gospel of John because he was an eyewitness and, therefore, had a better understanding of the full context of what took place and its meaning.** Today’s Scripture reveals an important aspect of Jesus’ authority, explains why a large crowd welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday, and discloses his call to us and all of his believers. So, let’s dive more deeply into the Reading.

The early part of this Scripture reports some not so flattering details about what Jesus was doing, which are found in vs. 4, 6, 11 and 14-15 showing, Jesus intentionally delayed going to help his friend Lazarus.

⁴ **“When Jesus heard it, he said, ‘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.’”**

⁶ **“Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days.”**

¹¹ **“Jesus said this and then added, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will go and wake him up.’”**

¹⁴ *“So Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead,’ ¹⁵ but for your sake I am glad that I was not with him, so that you will believe. Let us go to him.”*

Those verses demonstrate how important the raising of Lazarus from the dead was for the revealing of God’s glory and it was crucial proof of Jesus being the Son of God! **That miracle was needed, so Jesus’ disciples would believe in him.**

In verses 5, 33, 35-36, and 38, the Gospel of John informs us how Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

⁵ *“Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”*

³³ *“Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved.”*

³⁵ *“Jesus wept.”* ³⁶ *“See how much he loved him!” the people said.”*

³⁸ *“Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance.”*

Jesus’ love for these two sisters and brother was demonstrated through strong emotion! Jesus actually wept and the crowd took note of it. I believe, this is the only time, we are informed Jesus cried for someone, who was suffering!

Out of this very close personal relationship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, not only did Jesus show his love emotionally but actually declared himself to be the Lord of Life and he explained he would raise Lazarus from the dead. He told Martha in vs. 25-26, *“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?’”*

In verses 39-44 Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead is described in amazing detail! Take note, Jesus gave Lazarus life and called him to come out living the gift of the life Jesus gave him. Everyone was surely in awe as the dead man responded to the gift of life and Jesus’ call for Lazarus to come out by coming forth!

This Text reminds us we are also given the gift of the New Life in Christ or as Jesus declared in last week’s Scripture – *“life – life in all its fullness”* – *“eternal life”* – we are given the life of citizens of God’s Kingdom. Like Lazarus, we are called to come out of our bondage to death – come out of the selfish and self-centered type of life encouraged by society and the world.

A hint about the meaning of our calling was shown when the people in the crowd responded to his resurrection of Lazarus by believing in Jesus, as reported in verse 45. Word quickly spread the few miles to Jerusalem, which explains why there was such a large and eager crowd welcoming Jesus there on Palm Sunday. The Synoptic gospels provide no explanation for why Jesus received such a powerful welcome! Since they either did not know about Lazarus’ resurrection or chose to exclude reporting it for fear of possible difficulties resulting from its disclosure, the Synoptic gospels were not able to report its role in creating the crowd on Palm Sunday or the authors and their sources were not aware of its impact.

The examples of the crowd’s testimony about Lazarus’ resurrection and his response to the gift of the New Life in Christ and Jesus’ call to come out of death are powerful for us! This Reading provides a good opportunity to discern our gift of New Life in Christ – *“eternal life”* from God. **Indeed, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Divine Parent are calling us to come out of our imprisonment to the powers of evil, death, and selfish living and, then, we are to consistently live that New Life – the life of self-giving and sacrificial love!**

We are called to be good stewards of our gift of New Life, along with all of the other gifts God has given us of time, talent, energy, and all of our resources by making sure significant portions of them are utilized to support God’s purposes for the good of all, instead of just to fulfill our individual desires. Like Lazarus and the witnesses to his resurrection, we are to heed Christ’s call to come out and live the gift of life – transforming our everyday lives from the world’s path of selfishness and slavery to the false gods of wealth, desires, and power to God’s way of the agape self-giving and sacrificial loving life.

We are called to use our New Life in Christ and the gifts God has given us to fulfill the New Life by revealing God’s loving glory and enabling others to also come to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We are to reveal all people are given the gift of the New Life and called by Jesus to also come out of death to self-giving and sacrificial love – *“eternal life”*. **Let us answer Christ’s call to come out of the bonds of death and to live out the gifts from God, by living the New Life in Christ – “eternal life”!** Amen.