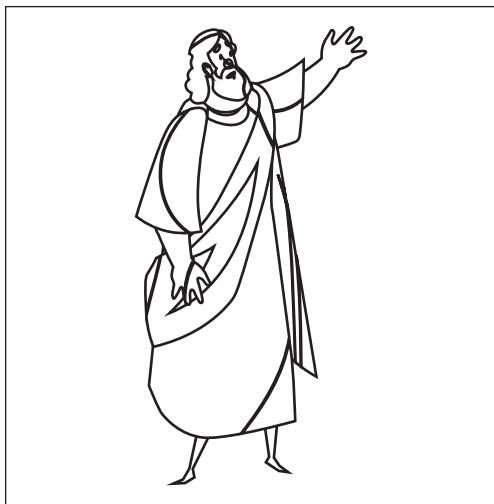


Lazarus

COMES BACK TO LIFE



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John 11:17-27, 38-44

A man by the name of Lazarus was sick in the village of Bethany. He had two sisters, Mary and Martha. The sisters sent a message to Jesus and told him that his good friend Lazarus was sick. Jesus knew that Lazarus had died and said to his disciples, “I am glad that I wasn’t there, because now you will have a chance to put your faith in me. Let’s go to him.”

When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died. When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask.” Jesus told her, “Your brother will live again!”

Martha answered, “I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised.” Jesus then said, “I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord!” she replied. “I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world.”

Jesus was still terribly upset. So he went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone rolled against the entrance. Then he told the people to roll the stone away. But Martha said, “Lord, you know that Lazarus has been dead four days, and there will be a bad smell.” Jesus replied, “Didn’t I tell you that if you had faith, you would see the glory of God?” After the stone had been rolled aside, Jesus looked up toward heaven and prayed, “Father, I thank you for answering my prayer. I know that you always answer my prayers. But I said this, so that the people here would believe that you sent me.”

When Jesus had finished praying, he shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” The man who had been dead came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of burial cloth, and a cloth covered his face. Jesus then told the people, “Untie him and let him go.”

Commentary

This miracle happened not long before the events of Holy Week and Easter. It was as if Jesus was using this moment to prepare people for what was about to happen to him, when he died and rose again. On that day, when the stone was rolled away from his tomb, it would be an even more glorious resurrection than Lazarus' return from the dead. Lazarus would die again, but Jesus was going to beat death for ever, and this is what he tells Martha, who puts her trust in him as the Son of God.

Mary and Martha were very special to Jesus and their brother's death made him very sad, but he was also angry at the way death and suffering had spoiled God's world. This is why Jesus came—to end the grip that death had on everything and to set people free, just as Lazarus needed untying from the burial cloths that were wrapped around him. This story points not just to Jesus as a good man or a great teacher, nor even as a compassionate healer, but to the deeper truth that he was sent by God with power over life and death. This is at the heart of what Christians believe, and, like Martha, we are being invited to respond to his question, "Do you believe this?"

Questions

- ▶ Why didn't Jesus arrive at Bethany sooner?
- ▶ Why do you think Martha believed that Jesus could bring her brother back from the dead?
- ▶ Can you imagine how the mourners in the garden reacted when Jesus told them to roll the stone away?
- ▶ Jesus prayed to God before the miracle happened. What can we learn from this prayer?



Visual aid

Use a box of tissues as a focus for all the sadness at the beginning of this story. Imagine how each person would have cried and what they would have said in appreciation of Lazarus at his funeral.



Activity idea

Use some rolls of toilet paper to wrap up one member of the family, just as Lazarus would have been wrapped up in the story. Be careful to make sure that he or she can still breathe easily! Then, on the command ‘Come out!’ see how quickly he or she can break free.



Prayer idea

From a large piece of paper, cut out the shape of the cross, and on one side write down all the words you can think of that are linked to suffering and death—for example, tears, sadness, darkness and fear. Now cross out each of these words, turn the paper over and cover the other side of the cross with resurrection words such as light, love, life, laughter, hope and joy. Thank God together for the power of Jesus to make everything new.

Key verse

Jesus then said, “I am the one who raises the dead to life” (John 11:25).

New Testament story link

Ezekiel 37:1-11: Ezekiel has a vision of dry bones coming to life again by the power of God’s word and God’s spirit.

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