

Todd Misfeldt

Font colors:

- Green: slide markers
- Red – Jesus' words – ignore color
- Gray: gives context – ignore words
- Blue – scripture – ignore color
- Section titles - ignore

WVPC Greeting

- Good morning.
- It is good to be back among so many familiar faces.
- For those of you who do not know me, my name is Todd Misfeldt.
- WVPC was my home church for 2 decades until pursuit of ordination took me away to an internship at another church.
- I'm now Pastor of Care and Discipleship at Christ Community Church of Milpitas.

Introduction

- John 11:17-46 is the recalling of Jesus raising a friend named Lazarus from the dead.
- These events take place on a day some 2,000 years ago in Judea.
- On its surface, the story is about a man named Lazarus being brought back to life by Jesus.
- The main characters of this story are Jesus, the sisters of Lazarus - Mary and Martha, and the Jews present to comfort Mary and Martha.
- However, upon further reflection, this story is really about faith in Jesus.

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Background

- Most of you are likely familiar with the story but let me give a brief recap.
- In the Gospel of John 10:22, Jesus is almost stoned by the Jews in the temple courts because of the signs, or miracles, that he had been performing.
- The Jews called this blasphemy or the act of claiming the attributes of God.
- Jesus escapes from those wanting to kill him and travels to a location about a day's walk away.

- At the same time, Jesus' good friend, Lazarus, was sick. His sisters, Mary, and Martha, send word to Jesus about their brother's illness.
- Lazarus dies, probably just after the messenger leaves to tell Jesus.
- After hearing of Lazarus' illness, Jesus doesn't act immediately but remains where he is for another two days.
- Then Jesus returns to Bethany, where Lazarus, Mary, and Martha live.
- Bethany is only a couple of miles from Jerusalem and the temple where the Jews tried to stone Jesus.
- Given the events of John 10:22, Jesus is placing himself in danger by returning to Bethany.

Martha's Faith

- Let's pick up the story in John 11:17.

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¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

(John 11:17-20, NIV)

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- Martha hears that Jesus is coming and rushes out to meet him.
- We don't know if Martha told Mary about Jesus' arrival, but I think not.
- Martha doesn't have time to think, she rushes out.

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- When Martha meets Jesus, she says:

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²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

(John 11:21-27, NIV)

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- From this interaction, it is clear that Martha has been around Jesus and knows his teachings.
- She must have seen Jesus healing those who were sick.
- She perhaps had heard of or witnessed Jesus restoring people to life who had died.
- In the gospel of Luke there are two people who are brought back to life by Jesus.
 - In Luke 7, Jesus restores a widow's son back to life.
 - In Luke 8, Jesus revives the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader.
- Martha expresses her faith that Jesus could have healed Lazarus if he had been in Bethany.
- She has faith that anything is possible through Jesus.
- With her brother Lazarus' death, things are different.
- Lazarus had been dead for four days. The other times mentioned in Luke involved people who had just recently died.

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- Martha interprets Jesus' response - "Your brother will rise again" according to what she must have heard Jesus teach.
 - Earlier in John 5:28-29 Jesus had said:

²⁸ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming (the last days, the day of judgement) when all who are in their graves will hear his (the Son of Man or Jesus') voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live..."
(John 5:28-29, NIV)

- She says: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."
- Jesus affirms her response in v. 25:

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
(John 11:25-26, NIV)

- To this, Martha responds with more than a simple yes but with a profound statement of who Jesus is in v. 27.

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."
(John 11:27, NIV)

Martha's Faith

- Martha has faith that Jesus is the Messiah and that in him is life eternal.
- Do we have as much faith?
- When Lazarus died, her grief could have pulled her down into a pit a despair.
- She could have become angry with Jesus and God for taking her loved one away from her and Mary.
- Martha didn't do this.
- She believed what she had seen Jesus do and she had incorporated his teaching into her heart.
- Her words to Jesus and her response to him is proof of this.

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Our Faith

- Do we have Martha's faith?
- Like Martha, many of us know Jesus' teaching.
- We know Jesus' deeds as recorded in the Gospels.
- But have we cemented our faith in both our hearts and minds?
 - Or, in times of grief or despair, do we dig our own pit of despair and sit in it when we should raise our eyes to Jesus and gain comfort from our faith in him?
- I acknowledge that our first reaction can be to turn inward, become self-focused, and to start settling into that pit of despair.
- Events of this life can be terrible, and they can hurt us to our very being.
- We must acknowledge these feelings, but we do not need to dwell on them any longer than necessary.
- Martha could have dwelled in the pit, but she quickly placed her faith in Jesus.

Mary's Faith

- Martha returns home and calls her sister Mary aside:

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²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

(John 11:28-32, NIV)

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- Mary, and her sister Martha, shared both their grief and their faith in Jesus' teachings and in his authority to heal.
- When told of Jesus' arrival outside of town, Mary, like Martha, rushed to be with him.
- Not only did she go to Jesus, but she fell at his feet.
 - Falling at someone's feet is acknowledging their authority.¹
 - Voluntarily falling at someone's feet it is a mark of reverence.²
- Through her actions, Mary acknowledges who Jesus is and complements Martha's words to Jesus just moments ago when Martha said in v. 21: [that you \(Jesus\) are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.](#)"

(John 11:21, NIV)

Shared Sorrow and Judgement

- Mary's sorrow was evident to all.
- In v. 33:

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³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

(John 11:33-35, NIV)

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- Jesus wept. Weeping does not raise Lazarus from the dead, it doesn't directly change anything.
- But it does show Jesus loves for Mary and Martha, and us.
- He knows what it is to have a loss.
- For this we can be comforted.

1 Leland Ryken et al., [Dictionary of Biblical Imagery](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 280.

2 Leland Ryken et al., [Dictionary of Biblical Imagery](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 280.

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- In my current role as a Pastor of Care and Discipleship at C3, I'm privileged to share Christ's love with people in pain.
- I can relate to Jesus' weeping.
- It is very natural to feel other people's grief and their sense of impending loss.
- It is very human to cry with them.
- I can't feel the true depth of their loss, but I feel it never-the-less.

- Commentators have speculated about the reason for Jesus' weeping.
- I believe it reflects his human side - his personal love for Lazarus - and his shared grief with Mary and Martha over their loss of their brother.
- Our hope or expectation that we and the deceased will live again in Christ does not decrease the loss that we feel in the moment.

- We also see the third main actor in our story – the Jews.
- When Mary was still in her house, probably crying her eyes out, she was accompanied by the Jews who had come to comfort her.
- When she suddenly got up, they followed her expecting to mourn with her at the tomb.
- When they see Jesus and his reaction to Mary's tears they say:

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³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

(John 11:36-37, NIV)

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- They too knew of Jesus' power to heal people.
- The healing miracles was one of the reasons that Jesus was forced to leave Jerusalem just before Lazarus' death.

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- Some saw the love Jesus had for Lazarus.
 - Others did not.
 - They saw Jesus as an enemy of the Pharisees in Jerusalem.
- Restoring sight to the blind was not enough to convince them to believe Jesus' claims about himself.
- Although these Jews were with Mary to support her in her time of grief, they did not all share her faith in Jesus.

- The scene now changes from the road outside of Bethany to the tomb where Lazarus is laid.

Faith in Action

- V. 38.

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³⁸Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹“Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”
(John 11:38-40, NIV)

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- Jesus' command to “Take away the stone,” is incredible.
- The practical side of Martha kicks in and she reminds Jesus of what he should already know – decay of Lazarus' body should have already kicked in.

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- When Jesus restores the widow's son back to life and when he revives the daughter of Jairus, they had just died.
 - A skeptic could argue that they were not really dead, just in a deep sleep.
- However, the story of Lazarus is different. He had been dead for four days.
- He was really dead. No mistake.
- Even the accompanying Jews who were skeptical of Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead.

For the Glory of God

- Jesus knew who he was.
- He knew his purpose was to glorify God and to lead us to do the same.
- He knew that his actions to restore Lazarus to life would glorify the God the Father and prove that his words were true and that he was sent by the Father.
- Remember in John 10:37–38 (NIV) Jesus had said to the Pharisees: **“³⁷ Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”**

(John 10:37–38, NIV)

- When they had removed the stone, Jesus prayed aloud - for us and those who surrounded him to hear, so that we all might believe.

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⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, **“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”**

⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, **“Lazarus, come out!”** ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, **“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”**

(John 11:41-44, NIV)

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- Jesus came through.
- He was who Mary and Martha believed that he was.
- Jesus' deeds demonstrate his words in John 10:38 (NIV): **the Father is in me (Jesus), and I (Jesus) in the Father.”**
- Jesus demonstrated his authority, and that he is someone we must believe.

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No Faith

- This isn't quite the end of the story.
- In vv. 45-46 we learn:

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⁴⁵Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

(John 11:45-46, NIV)

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- For some, seeing was believing.
- This was an incredible miracle.
- To raise someone who was dead and who was beginning to decay back to life - what more proof does one need of Jesus claims?

- Note the Jews did not complain that this was some sort of trick, that Lazarus wasn't really dead and that this was some sort of hoax.
- Some now believed in Jesus.
- Others, despite what they had witnessed, chose not to believe.
- The capacity to deny the proof in front of us amazes me.
- We see this capacity here in the reaction of the Jews who do not believe, but go off and tattle on Jesus to the Pharisees in Jerusalem who only believe in themselves.

- Some people see only what they want to see instead of seeing what God wants them to see.

- There is actually a name for this: **Confirmation Bias**.
- Confirmation Bias is believing what you want to believe in and ignoring what does not support what you want to believe.
 - Our mind will filter out what doesn't confirm a belief that we already hold as true.
 - We will see or hear what supports our belief and become almost blind to what doesn't reinforce our position.
- Confirmation Bias was happening in Jesus' time, it is true today, and it will likely be true until Jesus returns.

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Appreciate Jesus

- Although Martha knew Jesus' teaching and words, she had not fully appreciated who Jesus was and his power.
- Jesus, the creator of heaven and earth, has complete authority over this earth.
- What is our faith like? If Jesus told us to do something that didn't make sense or that we thought was impossible, would we do it or would we push back as Martha did when Jesus commanded the stone to be removed?
- Are we like the Jews who, after the dead man return to life, reject belief in Jesus and return to the powers of this world who plotted against Jesus?
- We each have to examine our hearts about whether our faith is strong enough to follow Jesus without questioning what Jesus tells us.
- It is tempting to have one foot planted in our faith, but also want to hedge our bets and keep the other foot in the beliefs of this world – to limit what God can do to what we think is possible.

Attacks of Faith

- There are other factors that attack our faith.
- As St Augustine in the 5th century pointed out, "Familiarity breeds contempt" or at least complacency.
- Many of us have heard this true story about Lazarus so often that it can lose its impact upon us. We hear the words describing this powerful deed, but the words are no longer processed by our mind.
- Really consider this deed. This impossible deed. This true deed.
- It should convince anyone that Jesus is God.

(Pause)

- The movies we see also conspire to minimize Jesus' deeds.
- We see superheroes who do amazing things in movies.
- But these are all fictional. They are not real.
- However, we see these often enough, and they are shown with such realism that we can get confused.
- We've seen fictional miracles so many times that they become ordinary.
- We must shake ourselves free of these fictional accounts.
- We must not let stories created by authors and screen writers blur what is reality.

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Know the Truth

- Martha and Mary did not have the disadvantage of the images of modern movies to cloud the power and truth of what Jesus did.
- Neither did Martha and Mary have the advantage of witnessing Easter— that Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead.
- Yet they had faith in Jesus.

- We have the advantage of knowing what happened on Easter.
- We know that Jesus has conquered death.
- We know that Jesus has prepared a place for us.
- We know that Jesus' word can absolutely be trusted.
- We must believe these truths.

- Come back in the following Sundays to learn more of the love of Jesus for us and the sacrifice that he was willing to make for us on Good Friday.
- As you hear the rest of the Easter story in the upcoming weeks, listen afresh to what Jesus did for you, what it means for you, and why you should believe in him with all you heart and soul.

Prayer

- Dear Jesus.
- Increase our faith.
- Send your spirit to point out our unbelief so that we might fully believe in you.
- Protect us from the temptation of familiarity with these events that can dull us to their significance.
- Help us to leave fiction behind and to rest firmly in the reality of your life and the Good News.
- Let us not trust our will but only your will.
- Amen.

22:45

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[Benediction](#)

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Corinthians 13:14)

or

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.—**Ephesians 3:20–21**