

The Grieving Sisters  
Encounters With Jesus  
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We are in the midst of our series based on the book by Keller “Encounters With Jesus” and we are on the third chapter called the “The Grieving Sisters”

The grieving sisters are  
Mary and Martha

Just to be clear, when I talk about Mary and Martha  
This is not the same Mary that was Jesus’ Mom  
This is a different Mary – Mary was a very common name back in Jesus day

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were great friends of Jesus  
They lived in Bethany (MAP?) , and many times in Scripture you read that  
Jesus sort of snuck off there, to hang out  
Or have dinner – or rest

Have you ever had a friend, who you could just go visit any time without  
fear that you were intruding? That’s exactly the kind of friendship Jesus  
enjoyed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

But one day the worst happened – Jesus got word that Lazarus had fallen ill

*And when Jesus actually got the word that Lazarus was ill he delayed  
coming to Mary and Martha, staying where he was longer before going to  
them. And so Lazarus then dies in the interim...*

Now you might think...Why would he do that? These are his dear friends  
Why delay? Didn’t Jesus care? Wouldn’t you or I go rushing to the scene?

Actually Jesus had a bigger plan than what Mary and Martha envisioned.  
The first thing we learn about Jesus from this story is that

**1. Jesus is a God who rights what is wrong**

## **When God seems to delay, he's still on his way!**

In our lives, it doesn't always seem that God is rushing to the scene for us – sometimes things seem to get worse before they get better.

When Jesus finally arrives in Bethany the sisters greet him and Martha says Lord, **“If you had been here my brother would not have died.”**

When we are waiting for God's action, and it seems as if he isn't listening or responding – Its easy to give up praying, or think that God doesn't care...

But often it is because there is something else he wants to do for us – that isn't even in our frame of reference – that's far more valuable and bigger than we have any idea

And we stand in the midst of our own frame of reference and say “God why? If you had done something by now it would have been so much better.”

But God is never late, and ***in the scripture Jesus can be trusted every time to come through for his people...to right what is wrong***

*In this case he raised Lazarus from the dead which no one had even thought possible*

Tim and I have two kids in college. Chris just finished his jr year and Julie, my daughter, just completed her freshman year.

Last year trying to figure out what college she was supposed to go to was a real challenge.

Some of you know we traveled all over the country visiting this college and that college – some of you are doing that now

But nothing seemed right – nothing seemed to quite fit

My daughter is a pray-er and would pray consistently about this decision, never really getting a clear answer except that in prayer she kept hearing the word **Amata**.

Now Amata means mother in Spanish, but it also was the name of a camp experience she had at a Christian camp – called Mt Hermon when she was about 12 years old.

It was a spiritually formative time for her, and she really bonded with the counselors there.

I said...in my type A way...Oh... you are supposed to apply for a camp counselor position at Mt Hermon...

Well that all fell through...and I give up trying to figure it all out

And we keep looking for colleges, and we have no idea what to do – nothing seemed right...and time was ticking...and some of you were asking “Where is Julie going to college” and I’d shrug cause I had no idea...and then different kids said “Oh I am going here...and going there...”and we didn’t know

What are you doing God? We prayed. Don’t you see us? Don’t you care?

And Julie is getting more and more discouraged. We apply really late to Azusa Pacific University - don’t hear anything and then...

Three days before she is supposed to let colleges know if she is coming or not — May 1 – she gets an academic scholarship to Azusa Pacific University.

So we give them a tentative YES not sure if this is right still ...but it seems the best of the options, and we go to the orientation.

This all happened mothers day last year. We don’t know a soul in the room. Not a one.

And after a brief video and a little summary of the school the kids were supposed to go off into small groups. Julie left, but fifteen minutes later she was back with tears in her eyes.

Mom, she says. You won’t believe who is here. Its my counselor – the one from Amata. And then the counselor came by and she was crying because Julie had told her, and we all hugged.

Why did we have to wait so long? Why was it so tough?

God wanted us to know that he was the one making things right...not us... it made the miracle so much more powerful. This last year at Azusa has been wonderful for

Julie, and the confirmation of that decision in this way is something we will never forget.

Jesus is the one who sets things right –  
When God delays he is on his way...to do a bigger thing than we have any idea of

Second, we learn from this story that Jesus is divine...

## 2. **Jesus is the God-man**

*In order to set things right in this world Jesus has to become like us in our vulnerability so that we can receive him and understand him; and yet at the same time he has to come with power and strength to deliver us from darkness...*

It almost seems like a contradiction in terms to have God and human together in the same being.

Its paradoxical, and in some ways almost contradictory and yet Jesus held those two things in his being perfectly...

I was trying to think of something I could use as an illustration of this paradox and I thought of the moebius strip.

A Möbius strip is made with a piece of paper and tape. If an ant were to crawl along the length of this strip, it would return to its starting point having traversed the entire length of the strip (on both sides of the original paper) without ever crossing an edge. So it's a three dimensional object with only surface.



Yet if I un tape this strip it has two edges and two surfaces and on and on...  
two seemingly contradictory forms in one object.

Jesus was the God/man – two seemingly contradictory concepts in one being  
Take a look...at how this plays out in the story

Jesus gets to Bethany– Lazarus is already dead  
The mourners are there, and Martha grabs him and says **“Lord, if you had been here – if only you had come when we asked you to come) – my brother would not have died.”**

Now in a minute Mary is going to say those exact same words to Jesus. And Jesus will respond to Mary in a completely different way than he does to Martha.

So listen for the difference. Keller says that the difference in Jesus’ two responses helps us see both the Divinity and the humanity of Christ.

To Martha – when she says this (point to screen) – he confronts her  
Her message to Jesus was **“You came too late”**  
Jesus’ replies, **“I am the resurrection and the life! With me it’s never too late. I am here.”**

The flow of her heart is toward despair, but Jesus is pushing against that flow  
He is rebuking her doubt, and giving her hope.

Then he sees Mary who says to him the exact same words **“Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

Jesus response is completely the opposite. He doesn’t argue. In fact he is speechless.  
And instead of pushing against the flow of her heart’s sadness – he enters it.  
He stands alongside her in grief

He bursts into tears and can only say, “Where is he?”

***Now imagine you were writing this story*** and you are making it all up.  
In your story a divine being appears at a funeral of a friend knowing that he has the power to raise the dead.

You would depict him as smiling maybe...right?

Or playful, or excited.

Maybe even rubbing his hands in anticipation and saying "Wait til you see what I can do!"

But never would you depict him as standing at the grave and weeping. But Jesus does...

This is not a made up story

And it shows us quite clearly both the Divine and the human nature of Jesus.

In his encounter with Martha Jesus declares his divinity and says "**I AM** the resurrection and the life."

The words I AM that I AM were Gods words spoken to Moses at the burning bush.

Anytime you see the word **I AM in scripture** it **is the declaration of divinity**. ... and there are many other places in scripture where Jesus declares his divinity...

Now its popular today for people to say that they appreciate Jesus as a prophet, or as a teacher – because they really respect the things he had to say - but **many people don't think Jesus was divine – he was just a really good guy**.

If you have anyone say that to you – just be aware of this little point - that you can't respect Jesus just as a good man or moral teacher – you have to respect him as God or nothing else - because if you think he was just a good guy...he was a good guy who was a lunatic – Jesus declares his divinity all through scripture

Who today says they are God? When I was a chaplain on a locked psychiatric unit I knew some people who thought they were God but *no one believed them*.

Jesus tells us he is God over and over again. So **either you think Jesus is a lunatic – completely out of his mind and you can't really take any of his claims seriously – or you do believe that he is God. But a good moral teacher only? No – it won't work.**

Now the fact that people who were Jews believed in Jesus is astounding.

There was deep cultural and theological skepticism in Judaism, (God was too vast to ever become a human – out of the range of theological possibility) it was next to impossible to convince a critical mass of Jews that you were God – unless that were really the most sensible explanation of the facts.

**Historical scholarship shows us that after his death, a fast growing body of people, who were faithful to Jewish monotheism, nonetheless began to worship Jesus as the one True God. Amazing!**

*What kind of life must Jesus have led to accomplish what no other person in history has ever done – convince more than a tiny percentage of unbalanced people that he is the Creator and Judge of the universe.!*

But that doesn't explain the totality of who he is.

The very next moment he breaks down sobbing beneath the weight of Mary's grief by the tomb of her brother.

You would think if a person were really divine he wouldn't get that upset but he does,

Despite his claim that he is the resurrection and the life – that he is God – he responds to Mary in this way because he is fully human as well

He is one with us.

He feels the horrific power of death and the grief just the way we do.

Keller puts it this way...

**“It is a paradox that Jesus is both God and human...it gives Jesus an overwhelming beauty....he has tenderness without weakness. Strength without harshness. Humility without the slightest lack of confidence. Unhesitating authority with a complete lack of self-absorption. Holiness and unending conviction without any shortage of approachability. Power without insensitivity.”** (pg 51-52)

And in this way he approaches the tomb of Lazarus.

### 3. Jesus hates death

**Verse 11: 38 reads** in your NIV “**Jesus deeply moved again went to the tomb**”

But this verse contains a greek word that means “**to bellow with anger**”. No one has ever translated it that way, and Keller himself says that this is actually the way it *should be* translated.

The word indicates here that Jesus isn’t just deeply moved but rather he is *absolutely furious* at this point “bellowing with anger”.

Who is he angry at?

Jesus is angry at death.

He doesn’t say “look, just get used to it folks– that’s the way it goes”

No, Jesus is outraged at the pain and loss he sees all around him

He’s mad at evil, and suffering

God the author of life hates death – which says that death and suffering and loss are because of us in this world...not him

Jesus approached Lazarus’ tomb incensed and outraged at death with tears on his cheeks after weeping

He knew that in order to interrupt Lazarus’ funeral he would have to summon his own funeral – because right after this miracle the Jewish leaders sought with new zeal to kill him

**“So from that day on they plotted to take his life” (vs 35)**

And Jesus knew that if he was going to save – not just Lazarus but the world from death he was going to have to die – he knew what it would cost him – the whole scene was a foreshadowing of his own death

He may have felt the jaws of death closing in on him, right then as he called with a loud voice “Lazarus, come out!” ...

Those around Jesus said, “**See how he loved him – Lazarus**”.

But we should actually declare “**See how he loves us**”

He became weak, vulnerable, killable



Not to bring judgment on us as a fearsome God, but to bear our judgment on the cross, with vulnerability and at the same time great power and strength in the resurrection.

#### **4. Jesus lives now so you can encounter him too**

I want to pray with you in a minute because in addition to understanding the concepts we talked about today, I want you also to experience the truth of it.

I don't want to just talk *about* the One who was present back in the Bible days...I want you to encounter him this morning.

I want you to open your hearts to receive him in a way that will renew you— lift you up, encourage you, heal you, forgive you – take that burden away, or perhaps speak a truth into your life that you need to hear.

I am aware of God's longing to do this for you; to become real for you all over again.

On Friday I was writing this sermon and a bullet point came up on my phone. It said that Jeb Magruder had died – he was a Watergate conspirator, but became a Presbyterian Pastor after that and attended Princeton Seminary

Jeb worked with my Dad – who encouraged him in many ways to become a pastor –

I remember that Jeb was frequently in our living room; because after all of his wheelings and dealings in the White House – knowing what that kind of power was like - Jeb had had an encounter with Jesus.

**Jesus set things right** for Jeb– and Jeb became a Christian asking for forgiveness and subsequently felt called to the ministry

And I remember him saying that he couldn't get over what he perceived to be **Jesus' great humility, and his great power wrapped into one.** So different than the power in the halls of the capitol. So different than anything he had ever experienced before. Where he had been dead like Lazarus, he was now alive...**He had met the God/man.**

Let's encounter that one in our midst who calls us to himself right now...lets have an encounter with Jesus. Let us pray...

A Möbius strip made with a piece of paper and tape. If an ant were to crawl along the length of this strip, it would return to its starting point having traversed the entire length of the strip (on both sides of the original paper) without ever crossing an edge.

The **Möbius strip** or **Möbius band** ([UK](#) /ˈmɜːrbiəs/ or [US](#) /ˈmoʊbiəs/; German: [ˈmøːbiʊs]), also **Mobius** or **Moebius**, is a [surface](#) with only one side and only one [boundary component](#). The Möbius strip has the [mathematical](#) property of being [non-orientable](#). It can be realized as a [ruled surface](#). It was discovered independently by the German [mathematicians August Ferdinand Möbius](#) and [Johann Benedict Listing](#) in 1858.<sup>[\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)</sup>

A model can easily be created by taking a paper strip and giving it a half-twist, and then joining the ends of the strip together to form a loop. In [Euclidean space](#) there are two types of Möbius strips depending on the direction of the half-twist: [clockwise and counterclockwise](#). That is to say, it is a [chiral](#) object with "handedness" (right-handed or left-handed).

The Möbius band (equally known as the Möbius strip) is not a surface of only one geometry (i.e., of only one exact size and shape), such as the half-twisted paper strip depicted in the illustration to the right. Rather, mathematicians refer to the (closed) Möbius band as any surface that is [homeomorphic](#) to this strip. Its boundary is a simple closed curve, i.e., homeomorphic to a circle. This allows for a very wide variety of geometric versions of the Möbius band as surfaces each having a definite size and shape. For example, any closed rectangle with length L and width W can be glued to itself (by identifying one edge with the opposite edge after a reversal of orientation) to make a Möbius band. Some of these can be smoothly