26 March – 1 April 2023 Jesus wept

John 11: 1-45

Read the passage from John. It is written below.

### The Death of Lazarus

**11**Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.**2**(This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) **3**So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

**4**When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” **5**Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **6**So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, **7**and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

**8**“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

**9**Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. **10**It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

**11**After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

**12**His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” **13**Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

**14**So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, **15**and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

**16**Then Thomas (also known as Didymus[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26540a)]) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

### Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

**17**On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. **18**Now Bethanywas less than two miles[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+1-45&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26542b)] 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.

**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.”

**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.”

**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.

**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?”

### Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

**38**Jesus, 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.”

**40**Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

**41**So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. **42**I 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.”

**43**When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” **44**The 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.”

### The Plot to Kill Jesus

**45**Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Bible notes

This is the last and greatest of the signs in John, by which Jesus reveals, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’ Its climax is Jesus’ command, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The crowd will shout out for Jesus’ death (19.6,15), but in Jesus’ shout we hear God’s life-giving Word. We have obdurate male disciples, thinking Jesus will awaken Lazarus by rousing him from slumber, and perceptive female followers. Martha expresses the belief in Jesus that brings life in his name (see 20.31), and Mary leads Jesus to the tomb, anticipating anointing him for his own impending burial (12.1-8). The sign affects the judgement for which Jesus came into the world (9.39). While many of his own Jewish people who were present believe, their leaders now plot to put both Jesus (11.53) and Lazarus (12.10) to death. Lazarus, like his sisters, is presented as both a friend and a disciple of Jesus. The little we are told about him is highly significant. Lazarus both loves and is loved by Jesus, and Lazarus welcomes Jesus into his home (12.1-2). His love for these siblings may explain why Jesus is so deeply moved and begins to weep when the grieving Mary comes to meet him, and this is what some of those present assume. But from the outset Jesus knows that he will raise Lazarus for God’s glory, delaying his arrival until Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. And, despite this, he is disturbed again when he comes to the tomb and says, ‘Take away the stone.’ All this foreshadows his own death and resurrection, and it may be that his disturbance, his weeping, and his prayer at the tomb, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me’ are John’s equivalent of the other Gospels’ account of Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. And if he is weeping also for his friends, it is perhaps because he knows what the cost of their faithfulness will be, something Thomas has already glimpsed as he urges his fellow disciples to go with Jesus to Lazarus’ tomb, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

This is a difficult passage for us to come to terms with. It is not within our experience for people to come back to life after they have been dead for four days. The nearest we come to it is when people are revived or resuscitated in the moments following a trauma or accident. So, we may have different responses to this story. Do we believe it at face value, or do we seek other explanations? A more important consideration, perhaps, is how John uses it to emphasise the transformation that Jesus can bring – as we might ask also of other ‘signs’ that Jesus performed, e.g. turning water into wine, multiplying loaves and fishes. In this story Jesus is no outsider. He is fully involved with the sadness of the situation, he wept. When Jesus offers us transformation, he comes beside us as a friend who know all about our struggles.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What does grief or loss feel like?
* What helps in such situations?
* What can we learn from the experience of grief about ourselves or each other?

## Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved.  
We have seen the closeness of Lazarus and his sisters,  
to each other and to you, Lord Jesus.  
We thank you that, through you,   
we too can have that shared experience.   
Thank you that in our time of grief,  
however long it takes, you are there.  
Thank you that you can bring new life to us.  
And thank you most of all for the gift of eternal life.   
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord, be with us on our journey of life.   
As we travel with you in the coming days,  
may we share your love and compassion   
with those we meet whose path is hard.  
Transform us, and transform them, with your life-giving love.  
**Amen.**

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