

## Fifth Sunday in Lent – John 11:1-45

### *Context*

This text takes us into Jesus' close relationships with friends – Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are siblings that Jesus seems to know well.

Everyone seems to assume that Jesus will use his power to cure Lazarus of his illness. They did not think that anything could be done after his death. By raising Lazarus, Jesus shows that there is life after death and that it is through Jesus, the Son of God, that such power exists.

The disciples are aware that certain death awaits Jesus in Jerusalem, and in a sign of solidarity, they say, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (v. 16)

When Jesus visits, it becomes not a condolence call to the grieving sisters, rather the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead – on the fourth day after his death, after he has been wrapped for burial and entombed.

Note Martha's confession (v. 27) that Jesus is the Messiah – the declaration of faith she makes before her brother is raised.

On the surface, we seem to see Jesus' love for his friend in v. 35, when he weeps. Jesus also seems clear that he will raise Lazarus from the dead. So is there another reason he is weeping?

If you were in the crowd, hearing and observing what took place, what would you think of Jesus, of his power? What would you think about the resurrection of the dead? Or life after death?

### *Themes and Terms*

Resurrection – For the people of Jesus' day, resurrection was understood as something that was possible at the end of time. It was mostly thought of as the resurrection of the people, a corporate act, rather than the resurrection of individuals.

Burial Practices – At the time of this gospel text, the burial custom would have included a ritual washing of the body and anointing with fragrant oils, such as nard and myrrh. The body was then wrapped in a linen shroud. After this, family and friends would pay their respects. A body was usually entombed within about eight hours of death. Gravesites were on the outskirts of towns, usually in caves or dug into rocky areas. In the procession to the grave, there might be singing or wailing, and "professional mourners" were sometimes hired to enhance the visible display of loss. A meal usually followed.

### *Questions for Reflection*

- Who do you most identify with in this week's passage?
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- What inspires or speaks to you in this text?
- What is God inviting you to be/do in this text?

### *Spiritual Perspectives*

This week's text gives an opportunity to consider cultural practices of Jesus' day, and our own, concerning death. It also invites us to think about how we have been shaped by understandings of life after death.

As we remember the deaths of people close to us, how does our faith and belief shape those experiences? How has your own understanding about death and resurrection changed over time? How might this gospel text help us encounter Jesus more deeply and help us understand how God is still speaking to us today?

### *Video: Heaven and Earth*

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/heaven-earth/>