

Encountering Jesus When We Have to Wait

March 26, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: John 11:1-27

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb

four days.

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Commentary: Martha does not hide her frustration and disappointment from Jesus over his delay in coming to heal Lazarus as he apparently was preoccupied with preparation for his ultimate journey to Jerusalem. Complaint is not incompatible with faith in Israel's tradition, as the lament psalms so profoundly demonstrate. She goes out to meet him, and expresses her conviction that if Jesus had not waited but had come earlier, he could have saved Lazarus from death. Yet Martha still sees in Jesus the possibility of something more: *"Even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask."*

Martha hears Jesus' response, promising that her brother will rise again, as an unsurprising expectation. Martha's reply is orthodox and true (at least for some within Second Temple Judaism, and certainly for John's community), affirming that resurrection will come for God's people at the end (as Jesus said in 6:39, 40, 44, 54). She has still not grasped the reality of the One who is with her, and so Jesus tries again: *"I am the resurrection and the life ... Do you believe this?"* It is a challenging inquiry, especially with Lazarus in the tomb and Martha's grief still so fresh. Yet it moves Martha beyond her earlier statement, and she declares that Jesus is *"the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

We often turn to this text at times of funerals and grief. But the text claims that Jesus' power over death is effective now, not simply in the pious expectations of the End. But as we wait now in the midst of injustices and tragedies and griefs and disappointments, we have a chance to remember that in all of the waiting we are held and loved and determined not by the powers of death but by the risen Jesus. That is so because Jesus is not simply one who can restore life, but the one who is life itself.

-adapted from commentary by Brian Peterson
(workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/jesus-raises-lazarus/commentary-on-john-111-44-3)

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. How could Jesus' pause be compatible with his love for Martha, Mary and Lazarus?
2. Keeping in mind the disciples' ominous words about what would happen when Jesus returns to Jerusalem, what do you think Jesus was doing during this two-day delay?
3. When Jesus arrives, Martha expressed her disappointment with Jesus' timing. Have you ever been disappointed in God's timing regarding a prayer/life concern? If so, how did you deal with this disappointment?
4. Jesus asks Martha if she believes in him as "*the resurrection and the life.*" What do you think she meant by her affirmative response? Do you think Jesus has something more in mind? Why or why not?
5. How does Jesus' statement, "*I am the resurrection and the life*" make a difference in your life, practically speaking?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: "*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*" (John 11:25-26).