

# All Saints Sunday

## FOR ALL THE SAINTS

John 11:32-44

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## Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

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## Diagnosis: “Death”

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Disappointed*

We gather to sing at the top of our lungs that great old hymn of the church, “For All the Saints.” Tears fill our eyes as we remember the dear “saints” who are no longer with us. The hymn assures us that while “we feebly struggle, they in glory shine.”

But there are times when those words seem empty. Our feeble struggle has been filled with disappointment. This is not the life we expected. We thought that our friendship with Jesus ought to count for more than this. Friends die. Children make bad choices. Marriages crumble. Unemployment or under-employment makes getting out of bed in the morning a chore. Our prayers seem like we are only talking to ourselves.

That same kind of disappointment afflicts Mary, Martha and their friends. Mary complains, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Her friendship with such a powerful friend as Jesus should have counted for more than this. After all, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *Disbelief*

Beneath the disappointment is a far greater problem. Even though Mary piously kneels and respectfully addresses Jesus as “Lord,” she simply does not believe that Jesus is the one sent from God (v. 42) and in whom she can trust. With the death of her brother, there is just too much evidence to the contrary. Even though Jesus had already performed several miraculous signs, it was not enough to sustain Mary and Martha and their friends in the face of the loss of Lazarus. They could no longer believe. Believe what? That Jesus had the power to prevent Lazarus from dying? No, their problem was worse. They no longer believed

Jesus had the power to deliver THEM in their time of need. How could they continue to believe that Jesus was there for them when Jesus could have been there in time to save Lazarus but chose not to?

We sense the anger seething beneath the surface as they not only complain about Jesus' late arrival but blame him for the demise of Lazarus. "If you had only been here . . . !" Had Jesus dawdled because he didn't care? Or, worse yet, did Jesus disdain them?

Doubt became anger. Anger had become disbelief . Mary's tears show that she not only grieved the loss of her brother. She fears the loss of a Jesus who no longer seems to care about her.

Martha is so disgusted that she seems to mock Jesus' Johnny-come-lately attempt to do something about Lazarus' death. "Lord, [aren't you a little late?!], already there is a stench because he has been dead four days," needling Jesus for his tardiness.

When you start blaming Jesus, you start blaming God. That is living dangerously. If Jesus is indeed the one sent by God (v. 42), then such complaints court disaster.

Our complaints reveal that this same dangerous condition afflicts us. When life does not go as we expect, we are prepared to storm the gates of heaven in a hostile take-over. We know better than Jesus on how to be God. We wouldn't dawdle like Jesus did. Any God worth believing in would be there for us when the ice starts to crack.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Doomed***

When Jesus arrived at Lazarus' home and finally saw what had happened, he too wept. Tears fill his eyes. But the tone of the Greek reveals that beneath the grief is also anger. Jesus is ticked! He is not pleased with the hold that death, despair, and

disbelief has on the lives of his friends. He is angry not only about what has happened to Lazarus but also about what has happened to Mary, Martha, and their friends.

Death has seeped into everything and everyone. If Lazarus has been death's victim, then so also is Mary. Such is the odd irony of humanity. Such is the hold that sin has on us. We have welcomed the enemy into our homes. We live as if death controls all, and then we foolishly believe that when God shows up, God will look the other way. God doesn't. No wonder Jesus cries . . . angrily. What is God to do with such foolishness?

No wonder no one escapes the cemetery. That is where sinners end up. The question is whether that is where they must stay.

## **PROGNOSIS: "Life"**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Defiant***

"So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But even this assessment was tempered with the complaint: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, make up your mind. God, are you for us or against us? Jesus loves, yet at the same time he is angry. These are signals of the theological crisis that perpetually seems to be at stake when humans live in a world that is under a death sentence. Is God for us or against us? Is God's last word judgment or mercy, death or life?

The evidence seems to imply the former. Lazarus has been dead for four days, has already begun to stink with decay and is sealed in his tomb. Jesus shows up late and seems surprised that everyone is so down about it all. They should have known better. He could have walked away and no one would have blamed him.

But Jesus defies conventional wisdom. He "bites his tongue" and resists the temptation to do what surely any of us would do to

such faithless knuckleheads. He refuses to take the bait to “get back and get even.” He defiantly thumbs his nose at death. He is determined to overcome the disbelief of his friends. He raises Lazarus from the dead.

Even though this was only a resuscitation, (Lazarus would live only to die again someday), there are “signs” that this “raising” of Lazarus is a foretaste of greater things to come, that is, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. (A stone sealing the grave is removed at Jesus’ resurrection. Strips of cloth bound both Lazarus and Jesus in the tomb. Both have those strips of cloth removed at their rising from death.)

All this is part of a sign of Jesus’ coming “glory,” his death on the cross. There Jesus willingly suffers the consequences of God’s anger with all of us who disbelieve. There Jesus defies the hold of death on this world. He goes to his death with no complaint, not blaming God nor griping that a savior did not show up in time to save his skin.

Ironically, where death seems to have the last word, we see its opposite. There love has the last word. There Jesus does what Mary, Martha, and all the rest cannot do: trusts the goodness of God.

Jesus is not disappointed. Jesus is raised from the dead. So, when Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” he was calling not only his friend but all of us.

#### **Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Believing***

As the stone is removed from Lazarus’ tomb, Jesus says a prayer (vv. 41-42) that he wants all of us to hear. Jesus is raising Lazarus from the dead so “that they may believe that you sent me.”

All these “signs” and miracles in the Gospel of John are

ultimately about one thing: to get disbelieving, complaining and disappointed sinners to trust God's gracious promise. Jesus wants all of us, who have resigned ourselves to coping with a world that cannot escape the grave, to believe that Lazarus' fate is also ours. Believing that promise changes everything. Believing that promise transforms sinners into saints. Even in the face of death saints do not need to complain and blame. Instead, we can sing, "For all the saints who from their labors rest." Instead we can patiently wait for the arrival of Jesus who on that glorious day will shout to all of us, "Come out!"

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Unbinding***

When Jesus asked those gathered outside the tomb of Lazarus to "unbind him and let him go," we see what happens when we trust Jesus' death defying promise. We no longer need to resign ourselves to living in a world that is doomed to the tomb. We see Jesus present among us already now rolling back the stone from a world that seems destined to die. In bread, wine, water and Word Jesus shouts out, "Come out!" Leaving the tomb behind us, fearless and unafraid, we go into our death riddled world and "Unbind [it] and let [it] go."

Through our deeds of selfless love, through our refusal to resign ourselves to the inevitable, we will not be thwarted by the stench of death. We will slowly peel off the strips of cloth and set free a world that thought it was doomed.

Many a congregation will sing on All Saints Sunday of this glorious day to come.

But then there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of glory passes on his way.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

The startling good news is that, for all the saints, this day

has already begun!

Freed from the stone we thought could never be removed from our tomb, free from our anger, complaints and fears, we can dare to “unbind” a world that is bound in the cloths of death.