

Fifth Sunday in Lent

GOING WITH JESUS

John 11:1-45

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Analysis by Bill White

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 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." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 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. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was

called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When 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." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So 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?"

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus 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." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I 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." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The 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."

45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Note: As we look toward "Grounding a person-with-a-problem" in this text, you may wish to note that there exists already excellent examples of Grounding the Problem / Solution for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in the archived "Text Study" on the Crossings web page. Specifically, the Year A studies for Lent 5 in 1999, 2005, and 2008. Hence, for the sake of variety from this text, I will here attempt a "Grounding" of Thomas.

DIAGNOSIS: GOING WITH JESUS UNTO DEATH

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Hopeless*

Thomas is distraught upon hearing Jesus say, "Let us go to Judea again" (v. 7). Remembering vividly how the Jews tried to stone Jesus the last time they were in Jerusalem, Thomas, along with

the other disciples, wonders now how Jesus could even consider going back to that region. "... are you going there again?" (v. 8). Thomas may very well have thought, "Surely it is too risky to return now! I don't care how close you are to that family, it is too dangerous!"

Jesus knows exactly what he is doing and why, but Thomas does not grasp it. Seeing that Jesus is determined and has made up his mind that they are going, Thomas-despondent and doubtful-says fatalistically to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (v. 16).

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Faithless*

Thomas' hopelessness is revelatory of a deeper problem. Because Thomas assumes that going with Jesus on this return trip to Judea will mean the disciples' death, he reveals a lack of faith in Jesus. What's more, at this stage Thomas believes the impending death of Jesus would be a bad thing!

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dying without Him*

Jesus has told the disciples, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe" (vv. 14-15a), and "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" (v. 4). Given his reaction, "Let us also go, that we may die with him," it appears that Thomas does not believe Jesus is the Son of God who has power even over death. Thomas will of course die, but with no belief in Jesus, he will die apart from Christ.

PROGNOSIS: GOING WITH JESUS UNTO DEATH AND LIFE

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Dying with Him*

This story is not about the death and resurrection of Lazarus, it is about the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the Gospel according to John, the glorifying of the Son of God is a

reference to the Son's return to the Father. The means by which the Son returns to the Father is Golgotha's cross. In other words, "to glorify the Son" is a way of speaking of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Jesus will die and rise again. By his death and glorious resurrection, Jesus has overcome the power of sin, evil and death, so that all who believe in him, even though they die, will also live again. As Jesus said to Martha, "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?" (vv. 25-26).

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Faithful*

Just like the many Jews who believed in Jesus because they "had seen what Jesus did" (v. 45), the day will come when Thomas also will see and believe. But the Jesus he will see and believe in is not just the Jesus who had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead. The Jesus Thomas will see and believe in is none other than the glorified Son of God, crucified and risen! As promised, Jesus will send the Advocate (15:26ff) to exchange Thomas' doubting, misplaced faith for a living faith in Christ. And when Thomas' time on earth is through, he will be counted among those of whom Jesus spoke when he said, "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (vv. 25-26).

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Hopeful*

This living faith in Christ will not only heal Thomas' fears, doubts and despair, it will empower him to go with Jesus into the future confident and hopeful. Trusting the promises of Christ Thomas will go with Jesus into the risky and dangerous places of the world to proclaim the hope-filled message of the glorified Son of God. For the remainder of his life Thomas will proclaim the Good News that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, the Good News that those who believe in Jesus, even though

they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in
Jesus me will never die.