

Fifth Sunday in Lent

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:1-45

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

DIAGNOSIS: “Lazarus Is Dead” (v. 14)

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Come Quick!*

Mary and Martha were in the middle of a family crisis. Their brother Lazarus was sick. So they sent a message to Jesus: “Lord, he whom you love is ill” (v. 3). Their message gave Jesus the facts about Lazarus’ dire need and reminded him of their brotherly love. Surely, Martha and Mary thought, Jesus would come immediately when he heard that his good friend Lazarus was ill. Wouldn’t he?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *No Reply*

But Jesus didn’t come right away. John writes, “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” (v. 6). For Mary and Martha, Jesus’ response was a stunning silence. They didn’t get to hear what Jesus said to his disciples to explain his delay: “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). All the sisters knew was that Jesus wasn’t with them. They thought that they, along with their dying brother, were on their own. Because he didn’t show up, their trust in Jesus was shaken.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *It’s Too Late*

So when Jesus does arrive, it's too late. Martha and Mary had put their brother in the tomb four days earlier (v. 17). Martha went out to meet Jesus as he approached their home. Her first words to him were an accusation, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21). She thinks there is nothing to be done. Martha even doubts Jesus' love for them since he failed to come when there was still a chance for him to heal her brother. Martha does say to Jesus, "I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" (v. 22). But she doesn't think God will give her brother back to her. He is dead. There's nothing she or Mary or Jesus or even God can do about Lazarus now. And as long as Martha believes that, she too will be cut off from God's saving presence. Her story will end where she thinks Lazarus's has: as a dead body in a tomb, bound in rags, left to face God's judgment alone.

PROGNOSIS: "Lazarus, Come Out!" (v. 43)

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *It's Not Too Late*
Martha doesn't think that Jesus can do anything now. She clings to the hope that her brother "will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (v. 24). But then Jesus announces that in him, God has changed the timetable. "I am the resurrection and the life," Jesus tells her, "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). Jesus is looking ahead to the day when he will be wrapped up in the signs of death, just like Lazarus is now. The one speaking to Martha is the one who will die on a cross, be wrapped in cloth, and put in a tomb. But his tomb will turn out to be empty. God will overcome death and resurrect his Son to eternal life. Jesus pulls this future promise of his own death and resurrection into the present with his words to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus is saying that Lazarus's story doesn't end with the tomb. And neither does Martha's or Mary's or anyone else's

who receives the promise of eternal life through him.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *The Heart's Reply*

Jesus invites Martha to participate in this promise by believing that what he says is true. "Do you believe this?" Jesus asks (v. 26). Martha replies, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (v. 27). Before, when Jesus didn't come to Lazarus's sickbed, when all Martha heard from Jesus was silence, she doubted his love for her brother and her sister and herself. After her conversation with Jesus, Martha's doubt has been transformed into faith. She confesses her faith in him as the Christ, as God's Son, and as the one invading the cosmos with God's power.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Come Out!*

Martha doesn't keep quiet this news about Jesus being the resurrection and the life. Immediately after Martha's confession of faith, she leaves Jesus on the path to her house and goes back to get her sister Mary, so she, too, can encounter Jesus. "The Teacher is here and is calling for you," she tells Mary (v. 28). The crowd that had gathered to comfort Mary goes with her, even though they also were skeptical about Jesus since he failed to come sooner (v. 37). Mary's reaction is identical to Martha's when she met Jesus arriving too late, it seemed, to save their brother. Mary hurls the same accusation at him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 32). Instead of engaging her in a conversation as he did with Martha, Jesus turns his attention to their brother. He cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (v. 43). Lazarus comes out of the tomb, wrapped in the cloths of the dead. Jesus tells the bystanders, "Unbind him, and let him go" (v. 44). The good news is shared and faith is passed on from Martha to Mary to those who were with them and saw Lazarus emerge from the tomb alive. John writes, "Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary

and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him" (v. 45). Today, in a world racked by death, we have the same good news to share so that more people will come to faith in him: Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in him will never die.