

Christ Presbyterian Church
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Love That Shows Up as New Life
John 11

*** This message was delivered by Pastor Kielsmeier in persona as Martha*

1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ... 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." 4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, 7 and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then 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 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Have you ever known a place so DARK, so desperate ~
That you despaired when the sun broke on...yet...another...day...?
Pause
Yeah, me too.

I *thought* I had found the answer. I mean THE answer. THE way.
I *thought* I had found my heart's desire - what I had always been searching for.

I *thought* I built my hope on solid ground...
Until everything began to crumble, and give way beneath my feet

The one I *thought* would always be there for us... apparently didn't care.

My name is Martha. Martha of Bethany.
This is not my first encounter with death.

I was only 14 when I married Nathaniel.
He was eight years my senior. Big guy. And could he make me laugh!
I thought we would grow old together; and yet the unthinkable happened.
Within a year of our wedding, Nathaniel grew ill and died.

I was completely numb.
The women washed his cold body -then covered him with spices and paste.
They took a long linen burial cloth and covered him from head to toe, tying it around his feet. Wrists. But when they were about to cover his face, I asked,
"Please, let me have a few last minutes with Nathaniel - alone."

I kissed him. His lips were cold and flaccid. No. My Nathaniel; he wasn't there. I slipped the linen face cloth over his head and fastened the strap under his chin to hold his jaw in place.

Of course the burial had to take place quickly; heat would cause rapid decay. The men carried him on a wooden stretcher to the family tomb. It was a cave with a widened doorway but it was difficult: down steep and narrow steps. Inside the tomb, the men carefully laid him on a shelf that had been prepared as a resting place.

Then, it took three men to push the large stone in front of the mouth of the tomb. They pushed the stone along an incline until it stopped with a thud. Wailing arose from the mourners. It was like a knife through my heart to the very core of my being. I hate death. I hate that it robbed me of my beloved Nathaniel. Of our future together. Of our dreams.

After the mourning period, I was sent back to my father's home... here in Bethany. My sister Mary was 13 and our little brother Lazarus was only 10.

It was providential that I did return, because within two year's time my mother and then my father also passed away.

Father called me to his bedside before he died. He asked me, as the oldest child, to watch over the family business, household and my sister and young brother until Lazarus became a man.

Fortunately, we were not left destitute. My father's grove of fig and olive trees on the Mount of Olives allowed us to make a living. We grew up in this two-story house, with its large upper room and shaded courtyard.

My parents were known for their hospitality; we kept that tradition. Pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem from Jericho would often seek refreshment and rest in our small village of Bethany. We particularly loved when itinerant rabbis and their disciples came. They would often teach in exchange for room and board. None of them made more of an impact upon Mary and Lazarus and me than Jesus of Nazareth.

I remember one visit in particular. The town was a buzz with Jesus' arrival. Word of his miracles and teaching had swept through our village and a crowd had formed. The whole town seemed to be in our courtyard. What with making sure everyone had wine, bread and water

to wash their feet, I never had a moment to hear more than bits and pieces of his teaching.

Then I saw Mary sitting there in the middle of the crowd at Jesus' feet, like she was one of his disciples. Any respectable woman would know that her place was in the kitchen with me!

I could hardly climb over all those people in the courtyard to whisper in Mary's ear. So I crept around the outside of the crowd trying to get Mary's attention by shooting her dagger looks - but NO! She only had eyes for Jesus.

But someone noticed me. Jesus. He stopped his teaching. Soon everyone was looking at me. All except Mary that is, she was still gazing angelically at Jesus.

"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone?
Tell her, please, tell her to help me."

"Martha, Martha," he said, "you are distracted and upset about many things, but few things are needed - or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Okay.

I have never been so humiliated in all my life.
I mean - in front of the whole town!
And I was the one being hospitable, doing what I should have been doing!
I swear, if all the town were not within earshot, there would not have been one piece of pottery left un-smashed in my kitchen!

But you know. He was right.
I am distracted often by so many things.
He has the very words of life. What could be more important than that?

I can't say I don't ever get overwhelmed. But the permission I was given to just let go of making sure everything was perfect has given me such freedom and peace.

Yes, Jesus changed my life. The truth and love he poured into our little family was life giving. Never had I met such a remarkable man. I began to believe that he might just be THE ONE: the Messiah we had been waiting for.

That was before Lazarus became so ill. We tried everything and he only grew worse.
We needed Jesus; surely he could heal Lazarus.

I quickly instructed the messenger Simon to find Jesus who was reported to be across the Jordan River in Perea.

“Tell him that Lazarus - the one he loves so much - is desperately ill. We need him to come quickly.”

We waited for Jesus to come.
And we waited...
But my brother Lazarus died.

For the fourth time in my life, I was burying a family member.
As we were following the stretcher to the tomb, Simon arrived.
Breathless, he told me he found the Rabbi.
I nodded.
“Yes? What did he say?”

“Lazarus’ sickness would not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

(Wailing) “But he has DIED Simon.
It is too late. Lazarus’ sickness HAS ended in death Simon! Where is Jesus?
Has he not come with you?”

“No, he was going to stay on in Perea a few more days,” replied Simon.

We waited for him to come.

And
We waited for him to come.

And
We waited.

And

When the sun rose on the fourth day,
My world was dark.
Maybe Jesus isn’t who I thought He was.
Maybe He doesn’t have the words of Truth.
Maybe He doesn’t really care.

4 DAYS after my brother died.
We were still waiting for Jesus to come.

I was outside the house; I needed to be alone.

The house was full of mourners from Jerusalem, including some of the religious leaders.

I was walking along the Jericho Road when one of the village boys came running up to me shouting.

“He is coming!” Pointing up the Jericho road, he cried, “Jesus is coming with his disciples!”

I gathered up my skirts and ran. My heart was pounding. He was outside the village gate when I reached him...“Lord - where have you been?” I asked. “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

23 Jesus looked at me and said, “Martha, your brother will rise again.”

24 “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Yes, I know that is true, and I do take comfort in that.

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

“Martha -Do you believe this?” Jesus asked.

Time stood still on that dusty road.

Suddenly, all the doubts, the despair, and the questions disappeared; I knew he was telling the truth.

“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. I will go tell Mary you are here.”

Mary (surrounded by a host of mourners) ran as I had and fell at his feet crying, “Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died!”

His heart broke.

“Where have you laid him?”

The men led him to the tomb.

When he saw the stone, Jesus’ eyes welled up again with great emotion. Jesus wept.

I could hear the religious leaders arguing about Jesus, “See how much he loved this man!”

But others said, “Didn’t Jesus open the eyes of the blind man? He could have showed up and healed this man so he would not have died. No, I think he is crying because he has failed.”

None of this was lost on Jesus.

“Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord, there will be a stench. Please, he has been there four days,” I protested.

Then Jesus said, “Oh Martha, Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

THOSE WORDS sent the men laboring at their task and with great effort they slowly rolled the stone away.

Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

After this moment passed, Jesus stooped to look into the dark entrance.

Then with a loud voice he said...
“Lazarus, come out!”

I held my breath with anticipation.
There was not a sound: not a bird nor a cricket nor a rustling wind broke the silence.

Was that a noise inside the tomb?
Yes, another, and a thump.

At the door of the tomb stood my brother Lazarus.
Bound head to toe in linen cloth.

Jesus said,
“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Never.
Never in a million years would I have ever expected that when Jesus showed up...THIS would happen.
Never.

Lord.

We are waiting for you to show up.

Some...are looking for healing, for a job, for peace, for an end to the suffering.

In our dark moments, we wonder

If you care.

If you keep your promises.

And if you will ever show up.

You just don't perform according to our expectations, or our categories, or our demands. It is frustrating and we lose heart.

Forgive us.

You come in such unexpected ways,

Bringing hope, bringing love, giving us life.

Come, again - Jesus.

Into our lives. Into our hearts. Into our darkness.

Emmanuel

Amen

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.