

<b>Series:</b> Portraits of Jesus	<b>Reference:</b> <i>John 11</i>	<b>Title:</b> Resurrection & Life	<b>Date:</b> 04.19.2020
<b>Website Writeup:</b> Is there something in life which seems insurmountable? Do you believe Jesus can overcome all things in life except this one thing? Let's see what happen to Mary & Martha in John 11			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

### Memory Verses for this Series - about 1 every 2 weeks

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh & made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one & only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace & truth. (Jn 1:14)

<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his one & only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

<sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit & in truth.” (Jn 4:24)

<sup>35</sup>Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (Jn 6:35)

<sup>31</sup>To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup>Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:31–32)

<sup>36</sup>So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (Jn 8:36)

<sup>34</sup>“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (Jn 13:34–35)

<sup>6</sup>Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Jn 14:6)

<sup>5</sup>“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:5)

<sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (Jn 20:29)

When I was in Indonesia, I befriended a Muslim Sultan, an old man of about 78, who became my adoptive father. He'd not seen part of his family for decades since there was no transportation to his village of origin. It was far out where there were no roads only a path cut through the jungle. I had just bought an old Toyota Land Cruiser, a big jeep with knobby tires. So we piled a bunch of the villagers in the jeep & cut out through the jungle. Hours later we ended up at his birthplace, a tiny village tucked in the mountains of Sumatra. We spent 3 or 4 days there talking, bathing in the river, drinking coffee & hanging out with his family. When it came time to go home we were told that the road, if you want to call it a road, was blocked by a landslide with a huge boulder in the middle.

With all the bravado of a young naive American I said, "No problem, I've got a jeep! We will just drive over the landslide!" They urged me not to try but I wouldn't listen. We set out & drove for a few hours only to eventually come upon the largest cartoon sized boulder I'd ever seen in the middle of the road. I felt sheepish. There was no going around & I'll have to share the ending of that story some other time, it's funny. That experience has served as a life lesson for me.

America's a nation of self-made people. The Mayflower, set sail in 1620 with 102 people aboard. Three of which were pregnant, one giving birth during the journey, so all in all there were 103. The first half of the journey went fine, but the weather went bad on the second half. They had a broken mast, leaks, lack of food, sickness & death. It wasn't an easy journey, physically, or emotionally.

Think about hopping on that ship, kids in tow, not really knowing where you were going, what would happen, and if you'd even get to your destination. Leaving all familiarity & comfort behind, knowing you'd never return. They must've been a tough breed, risk takers, not weak minded, easily scared, or meek. Hardy people, the kind that hoped on a dream & made things happen. Exceptional, even in their ordinary lives, earning their place in the 'New World' with courage. No one gave them America. They fought for it against the elements, sickness, and even each other at times. They cleared fields, established government & law, planted crops, sweat, bled & sacrificed for all that they wanted & saw before them. Not all our nations history is commendable we know, but much is, and a pregnant mother getting on a ship for the new world is inspiring.

This forged in us a strong individualistic world view. The movie *Far & Away* with Tom Cruise & Nicole Kidman depicts this spirit. In one scene the settlers formed a line on foot, horseback & Conestoga. The gun went off & they raced out to stick their flag into a special plot of land which each of them had eyed up prior to the race. This was called '*staking your claim*'. A brutal race. We all cheered as Tom rode, ran & crawled to his spot to jam his flag into the dirt - it was a symbol of the American Spirit. He did it. Worked for what he wanted, claimed it. Self-made. An individual. We relate as Americans. That's what made it a good movie; it struck right at the heart of our individualistic world view. Win the land, win the woman, claim it! The individual!

We like to think we've developed one of the greatest nations in the history of mankind. That our accomplishments reach farther than any other nation in history. We tackle

seemingly insurmountable odds' everyday in technology, finance & medicine. We've gone to the moon, to Mars & have even gone back to looking at the split second before time began with the Hubble Space Telescope. Our computers hold libraries of information. Doctors reattach severed limbs, repair hearts, prolong life, blast cancer out of a body with radiation & control moods with drugs. Our educational system is top-notch, masters, doctorates & salaries to match. There's nothing we can't do. Nothing can hold us back.

Then...one microscopic virus grinds our economy to a halt. An unseen minuscule enemy takes away our freedom. But even before that we could ask, why do we have so much relational devastation in society? Why are we so polarized? Why is it that the USA leads in murder, suicide & abortions rates among Industrialized Nations? Why is it that 60% of children will grow up living at some point in their childhood in a single parent home? Why has the divorce rate tripled since 1970? School shootings. Drugs, prostitution & pornography. 64% of us overweight or obese. Violent offender's make up for 63% of prison populations. Why can't we get along?

At holidays many feel more judged by relatives than encouraged & loved. Why can't you make up with that one person who hurt you years ago? Why can't you forgive that sin from years' past? Why do you feel so lonely & depressed at times? Why is my marriage falling apart? Why can't I control myself? Why am I so angry? Why is it that I can't get along with people?

We glory in accomplishment, but sometimes we come to a rock in the middle of the road of life. We have to say that all our gifts, abilities, money & knowledge aren't enough. All I am isn't enough to fix this relationship, lose weight, bring change, save this marriage, keep my children safe, quit this or that, or just be satisfied. In relationships, self expectation, politics, alcohol, drugs, the death or sickness of loved ones, with children, family & marriage we come to the end of our ourselves, faced with a rock in our path we can't get around.

In John 11 Martha & Mary, two sisters are faced with such an obstacle. Their brother's sick & dying. Nothing they can do, but wipe his forehead & watch him wither. Powerless over the situation, they come to a rock blocking their path. Soon their brother will be on the other side of that rock, figuratively & literally - he'll be dead, entombed with a large rock rolled in front him.

But they have an ace in the hole, a relationship with Jesus who loves their brother. He's healed others, surely he'll come & heal Lazarus. But time is of the essence, death looms. They have to send for him now, since Jesus is about 25 miles away & has to walk. When backpacking I do about 10-30 miles in a day. So they send for him with these words in V3, "*Lord, the one you love is sick.*" Then wait. He's healed other people, fed 5000, changed water to wine, done things for people He wasn't even close with, surely He'll run & help Lazarus, the ones He loves. He'll rush! You can imagine these women saying to Lazarus, "Don't worry, we've sent for Jesus, he'll be here soon, just hang on he'll heal you."

But a day goes by, then another & Jesus doesn't come. Lazarus dies. If only He'd come. But He didn't & the stone's rolled in front of the tomb forever locking away the dead body of their brother. In the Judaeen heat, bodies decay quickly & were usually buried the day of demise. They say a person can only survive three days without water & Lazarus will have been in the tomb for four before Jesus even shows up. There's no question Lazarus was dead. Jews believed also that after three days the soul left the body, so not only was he physically dead, but this cadaver would now be soulless according to Jewish tradition.

Imagine their anguish. Maybe a little perturbed with Jesus for not rushing to the aide of their brother. I imagine the messenger ran to deliver the message, maybe he even returned before Jesus. Maybe he came back & said Jesus says He'll come but doesn't seem to be in a hurry. Martha runs out to meet Jesus when she hears of His arrival saying in V21 *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* You can almost hear the frustration & emotion in her voice, 'IF you'd been here. But now there's a stone, a cartoon sized boulder between me & my brother forever & I can't get around it.' However, she knows enough to say in V22, *"But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."* Which sounds like a statement of faith - as if she knew He could raise her brother even now. But this story is more about building the faith of Martha & Mary, and all the others there, mourning Lazarus.

Because even though she makes that statement, there's nothing which indicates she expects Jesus to raise her brother from the dead. Because Jesus says in V23, *"...Your brother will rise again."* <sup>24</sup> *Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* In other words, 'I know, he's gone. A stone locks him away & I'll see him again at the end of time.' She betrays her limited faith in who Jesus is & of what He's capable. She doesn't believe it's possible Jesus can do anything about this problem of death. Even HE can't get around this.

But in v25, *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection & the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"* So, Mary, Martha & all the other mourners there, have been presented with the greatest of obstacles, death. Do you ever get frustrated with Jesus when facing obstacles? Ever want Him to just give you a clear answer & direction? To outline the exact plan of action He'll take, so you can have peace & sleep at night? Are you facing a boulder in the path which you can't get around? You call on Jesus, expecting Him to run to you, sit down & say, "Okay, this is what we're gonna do," then to lay out a plan. You want Him to run since you're closer to Him than anyone else. We want Him to be our crystal ball, tell the future & what He'll do to resolve our problem, but He doesn't. All He says is cryptic things like I'm The Resurrection & The Life, do you believe in me? "Sure, I believe, but I wanna know what you're gonna do!" But Jesus doesn't tell, He asks questions of trust, "Do you believe that I have power over even the worst of your problems?" He's leading us into a life of faith which finds peace even while standing in front of our boulders.

The pop-culture view of God is one of *moralistic therapeutic deism*. Viewing God as loving & good, and who just wants us happy. He helps with our problems & wants us to be loving & good like Him. But He's not particularly demanding or judgmental & He basically doesn't impose on us. The Biblical portrait of God is different. He's Lord & calls us to a higher standard made possible by His grace. He doesn't just take our tension away. He's dealing with evil, and walking through it with us. He allows us to experience pain of loss as like it says in Ecclesiastes 7:2-4... *It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.* <sup>3</sup> *Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.* <sup>4</sup> *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.*

Why doesn't God just take the Corona Virus away? I don't know. Questions like that only get us caught in philosophical quicksand. The real question is do I trust Him even in the face of financial ruin & death? His timeline is not mine, my emergency is not His, but do I believe He is working for the glory of His name & the benefit of humankind? Obstacles aren't necessarily bad, rather they are opportunities to see faith strengthened.

I've had to make hard decisions in life. Often times I'm faced with a problem which I feel I can't get around. Typically, I stand in front of my boulders, get anxious & fight to make something happen. I'm impatient & take control even though I'm powerless. I kick & cry in prayer asking Jesus to lay out a plan, but He doesn't. All He says is be patient, I'm coming. I'm coming in my own time, and in my own way, and when I come to address your boulder it will be in a way you don't expect. Martha answers in V27... *"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."* Which is still not the answer Jesus sought, it was just as cryptic as His. As if to say, "Sure you're the Messiah...whatever, but you still can't do anything about this problem."

Then Mary's called & says the same thing in V32... *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* They're assured of His power on this side of death - you could've healed him! But now all hope is gone & their problem is symbolized by a large stone which they can't get by. And it says in V33... *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit & troubled.* That's tame language - the original Greek expresses a deep anger. A deep anger not at Mary or Martha, but at the pain & suffering which sin caused by bringing death upon those He loves. He weeps, has emotion & loves these people.

And in V36... *Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"* God weeps for our pain, standing right in the midst of struggles weeping for the pain our boulders bring us. However, there are some there who are saying the same Mary & Martha did. Look at V37... *But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"* He can do all that, but He's met his match with a death. He has no mastery over the worst of things. Isn't that how we feel right now with this pandemic? If He'd only showed up when I needed Him at the right time, I'd be okay! If He'd come when I wanted Him to come, when I thought it was so urgent, then all

would've been well. It's too late now, He can't do anything at this point about my problems, they're too far gone, too large, they've decayed behind my stone too long.

But Jesus stands in front of the stone & says in V39... *"Take away the stone,"* Do your part, roll the stone away of your heart away, all of you together! Let me in, let me peer into the worst of your problems. You rolled the stone in front of your heart, now remove it. Together, as a community, get behind the stones of your heart & encourage each other to roll them away - shoulder the burden together. Helping each other to open the wounds & allow Jesus to work!

But we don't want to...we turn to Jesus & say the same that Martha does in V39... *"But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."* Jesus, you don't want to go there! My problems stink, they've been locked away 20 years behind this stone for good reason. There's too much behind that stone - they're too far gone. I vowed long ago, I didn't want to deal with this, please don't make me open it all up again. I've dealt with it in my own way, I've locked it away so I can't smell it!

But have we really dealt with it? The way we deal with problems is to lock them away, decaying & festering behind large immovable stones - the internal vows we take. You can't roll that stone away yourself. It's gonna take others...counseling, talking about it, prayer, a willingness to work, vulnerability, openness, courage to face those dead parts of yourself which need resurrection, to have others shoulder your burden & push that stone away from your heart to allow Jesus access to your worst smelling problems. But we say no. And Jesus answers us, as He does Martha in V40... *"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*

Then continuing in VV41-44...*So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up & 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 & feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes & let him go."*

We try to ignore our problems hoping they'll stay locked away. We stuff past pain, hide our insecurities & harbor bitterness in a dark tomb. To keep that tomb closed would've caused Lazarus to keep right on rotting. Keeping our problems closed off from Jesus will cause them to only fester. They'll not stay locked away, we'll have to work in community to open ourselves up, giving Him access. Believing nothing can be done about our problem is the problem! Isolation is the enemy. We turn away from the only One who has a solution, and keeping Him separated from our problems means He can't help. Like a little kid clutching a broken toy, "No! Don't touch it, you can't fix it daddy!"

Now we have to remember, Jesus didn't raise everyone who died. However, He's promised to raise those whose faith is in Him at the last day. He clearly used this situation to build faith in others at that moment - He uses this moment to say, *I am the Resurrection & the Life*. It's His choice where & how He'll work. It's His authority &

power. However, He doesn't want us to lock away our issues to have them fester. He wants to open us up on this faith journey, bringing life back to those deadened parts of ourselves. When we've lived behind a boulder for what seems like an eternity, there's hope, Jesus is coming. Jesus raises the dead! He's angered at the death & loss of life in us. He stands in front of that stone weeping over loss & pain. He battles for us. He has victory on the cross, the war is won. Yet, the battle goes on, He's in process of reversing that order now - and we'll see final victory. Spring didn't come to Narnia without a fight - the spring which emerged out of the frozen wilderness was progressive. Jesus will reveal His glory & we need to help each other to roll the stone away to allow Him to work.

None of us wants to be governed by fear keeping our rotting cadavers locked away which only continually resurface. We want to be a community of encouragement & care for each other enough to roll those stones away & watch Jesus raise the dead. Allowing Him to renew the deadened parts of us which we've locked away. Walking with Jesus in the context of community flies right in the face of the Individualistic American Spirit. Realize though, we always come to the end of ourselves. We're not as great & strong as we think. Refusing to face our issues, dealing with it on our own never works. Jesus demands faith, not because He's prideful, but because He wants us to live in the peace of knowing He's the Resurrection & the Life. He has power to address the worst of things in our lives if we'll allow Him to do so.

How do you roll that stone away? You do that, through a number of different avenues in community with others.

Firstly, remember isolation is destructive. Anyone who decides they don't want to talk about their issues invites the Evil One to take over their thinking - and he only wants to bring death. Jesus works through the Body of Christ in amazing ways & it urges us to confess our sins to one another for this reason! Don't ever think that someone is better than you, or they won't understand your issues. But also don't think that Jesus will not call you to transformation either, He's not a moralistic therapeutic counselor just to make you feel better. He calls you higher, which is always better for you. Jesus works through the Body of believers to bring life. Through things like Corporate worship, Community Groups, Prayer Ministry, Quiet Times, Spiritual Formation Practices (Mentors), Confession, Counseling, and even Medication when needed.

Secondly, find His voice in Scripture giving you the ability to identify falsehood. This is why personal quiet times are so important for spiritual formation; to recognize falsehood from Truth. Because many of us believe lies about ourselves & others which are contrary to the Scriptures. These are the dead cadavers behind the stone. Replace lies with Truth directly from Scripture. Truth about who Jesus is, and who yourself & others are in light of Him. Refer to the last 3 pages about who you are in Christ at the end of the sermon last week. The more you know who you are in Christ, the more your heart, thinking & behavior reflect your true identity. As Romans 12:2 says, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"*.

**Community Group Study Questions:**

1. **Icebreaker:** what is the first place you hope to go to when our shut down lifts?
2. This week's sermon paints a pretty relevant picture of our own lives. Read Matthew 16:21-44 about Mary and Martha sending for Jesus to heal Lazarus, mourning him, confronting Jesus and seeing him raised from the dead.
3. How do you react to Jesus when you face a hardship in life?
4. Consider the metaphor of the tomb and the stone with yourself. Read verses 39-44. Notice that Jesus tells them to roll away the stone, meaning they (and we) have some level of participation in experiencing the joy in resurrection. What are some ways or processes we can use to roll away the stones of our lives, and open ourselves up to new life?
5. Think about the process Lazarus went through. He went from dead to alive, smelly and clothed in burial cloths to clean and restored. How can we make this transformation from death to life nowadays? What specific tools do you look to in spiritual transformation?
6. Is anyone in group feeling particularly buried or stuck behind a stone? Pray for life and breakthrough for one another. Consider the gift of community and walking alongside a spiritual mentor for a period of time or receiving soaking prayer ministry at church-all can be done virtually now too!