

# John 11:1-27

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. And when Jesus heard this, he said, this illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this, he said to the disciples, let us go to Judea again. The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again? Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he will not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him. The disciples said to him, Lord, if he had fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died. And for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe, but let us go to him.

So Thomas, called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go that we may die with him. Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. Now when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? She said to him, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God, who is coming into the world. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

I don't know what you make of a bucket list, but I don't think they're all unhealthy. I had my own one. And a bucket list is comprised of things you'd like to do before you die. There's only about one thing left on mine. It's not incredibly meaningful. But I'd like to drive a combine on a November crisp morning right through the heart of a field of corn, not the end row. I want to line it up in the middle and go from one end to the other. I'm a city boy, but born suburban, never rural.

[ 4 : 1 3 ]     But I think that would be a great thing to do while still living. Harvest the remaining 20% of a field that is yet standing. I'm actually looking forward at some point to the sound of the grain being separated and a field being prepared for winter. My bucket list. I don't know if you have one, but I'm here to also tell you today that far more important than something you want to do before you die is to sort out in life what to make of death itself. You come to church and it's a unique environment. It's unlike any other thing you do during the week. And sometimes the unfamiliarity on a Sunday morning is healthy for you.

It doesn't always wind you up and spin you out like a top. Coming to church doesn't always mean that you have some incredible experiential moment of inner joy or sorrow. But when you make a practice of coming to church week by week as you are doing here in increasing numbers, one thing I can assure you of, you will be dealing with things in this hour that you normally don't give yourself to during the week.

And far more important than coming up with a list of all the things you want to do in life is to stop, to sit, to listen for a moment on something as significant, something as consequential, something with unsurpassing immensity. What is it that I will make of death? Indeed, we'll all encounter it. We'll all succumb to it. And it's not necessarily, therefore, a morbid thing to spend 25 minutes considering it. I want to look at the text the first half this week, the second half next week, this stupendous account of Lazarus and his death and this resurrection through Jesus that's been recorded for us. And I want to look at it today, just the first half, through some of the characters and see what they are making of death. The sisters, let me just put it to you this way, the sisters are dealing with it. The disciples in verses 7 through 16 demonstrate the range of what people make of it. Martha then is going to have her own conviction on it, followed by Jesus' claim over it.

So just follow the characters on death. The sisters, I love the way it's put there, verse 3, so the sisters. The sisters are dealing with it. It was, in their family, inescapable at this moment.

Lazarus was ill. He was ill twice over in the text. He was ill to the point where they seemed to understand his physical frame had entered into that season of dissolution that was inescapably going to end in tragedy. That moment where our spirit goes back to God who gave it and our body goes into the ground. That moment when life really is this separating sequence like a blackened chrysalis that has been vacated by life and is now only a shell that nothing can be done with. They, they sent for Jesus because they knew they were dealing with it. They were attending to their beloved brother probably for some days on their own.

[ 8 : 42 ] You're going to have to deal with it. One of the great fortunate circumstances of life is to get close enough to it that you consider its immensity.

Some of you may know, perhaps from the congregational prayer, Lisa's mother passed this week. The sisters.

Five in number. And by the way, she has encouraged me. It's too close for her to say anything on it, but encouraged me even in this sermon to share what I would like concerning it.

But Lisa's one of five sisters. And the sisters have been dealing with the deterioration of the life of their mother for some years.

The mind first, and then the body follows. And it was a long receding work over the course of a decade that came to its conclusion this week.

[ 9 : 53 ] What a joy to see the sisters. Four of the five were in town. All five were with her just a short few days before that. Three of them attending to their mother day and night for three consecutive evenings of darkness.

and the final days for Florence Schmid were not easy physically. It was very much like watching someone who you felt the next breath could be their last and yet that went on for three days.

But the fortunate thing is the tenderness and care of the family. 27 people last Sunday night actually paraded through grandchildren great grandchildren some of whom had never because we live in such a sterilized world never been at the bedside of one who would soon be with us no longer.

Now as a pastor I've been in those situations many times and some of them with you in grief and we know what it is to see life enter the world and be gone like a vapor within an hour.

I know what it is to be with someone who dies in their last breaths before before the morphine actually settled them into some contemplative peace or rest were loud curses to God all the way out.

[ 11 : 47 ] I know what it is to live with people who some of their last words are literally these it's not fair I wasn't finished.

I know what it is to be bedside by those who come to a faith and a profession in a Christian message like a thief on the cross and then are gone.

And I know what it is to watch people deal with it. The sisters and even in this week children on their knees before the elegant woman would leave breath upon breath until we will tomorrow morning commend her spirit to the Lord commit her body to the ground and celebrate her life with a service.

My children are privileged people to be at a tender age and know something of dealing with it.

The disciples though they in verses 7 through 16 I think fully represent the range of what we normally make of it.

[ 13 : 31 ] Notice it isn't just Lazarus' death that dominates the text. Look at verse 7 and after this he said to the disciples let us go to Judea and the disciples said Rabbi the Jews were just now seeking to stone you.

You're going there again? In other words why would we want to walk into trouble into harm's way where death is there?

In other words they represent a healthy avoidance of death. Let's not get on them. This is a rightful human response to what you do with it.

You don't just walk into this lightly. But look at verse 18 I guess it is 16 I'm sorry.

So Thomas called the twin said to his fellows disciples let us also go that we may die with him. There's the full range. What is the range of which humanity wrestles with the question of death?

[ 14 : 37 ] Well one stay as far away from it for as long as possible. Two when it is inevitable attach some inherent meaning to it.

It's a bit ambiguous at the end there in 16 what Thomas meant. Is he basically despondent and bowing to the purposelessness of life?

We don't know. Is he actually engendering within his spirit that there are times in life that there is something worth dying for or someone worth dying for and therefore he's attaching some cause to his death that will outlive him.

But that is right there from verses 7 to 16 the full range the either end of the human response to what we make of death.

Avoidance until it comes an attachment of some kind of meaning if indeed I am going to go through it myself. I think of Woody Allen on the rightful avoidance.

[ 15 : 58 ] He says, I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens. Isn't that great? That's great. Nothing wrong with that.

Or we attach some greater purpose to it. Think of the range. For some, you might end up believing that because of death and you look it squarely in the eye, it would create an acute aimless purposelessness to your life.

This is what a philosophy of nihilism actually embraces that we're here, there will be a day when we're not here, but there is therefore this purposelessness to it all.

So when one begins to consider death even over a 30 minute period, avoidance isn't the only reaction.

At some point there's an acute aimlessness and a questioning that will begin to emerge in your own mind. Well then, to what end?

[ 17 : 22 ] There's an entire body of literature given to wrestling with the despair. death. At the end, that's what some people end up making of death.

But that's not the only one. When you think of the continuum, which the disciples have laid out the either end, there's also a lot of activity that will come. I mean, think of it, if you were to walk out here today and go, wow, I went to church and thought about something I don't even want to think about.

This is why I keep my AirPod, my AirPods, what is it that you wear these days? Whatever the new ones are, I want them. But there's a, sorry, I'm losing, but we push it aside and rather than feeling aimless through life, your consideration of death might lead you to incredible productivity.

In other words, you might say, in light of that, I'm going to make my life count. And people do that on a variety of ways. Some have said that architecture itself is mankind's attempt to outlive its own momentary period on life.

In other words, I'm going to leave something. I'm going make my mark. And so people don't just go through aimlessly. Some people, when they consider death, men, they're totally focused.

[ 18 : 56 ] They're some of the most productive people in the world. Are men and women, Christian and not Christian, because they've considered the end? Productivity isn't the only thing, though.

You may, as you consider death, you might just think, well, wow, if that's the deal, then pleasure is about all you got.

God. Which, a number of people then, you get that phrase that comes out throughout history in various forms in literature, let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.

And so there will be young men and women here who will think, I know death is there, I know it's healthy to avoid it as long as possible, I'd like to maybe one day consider attaching some meaning to it when it's inevitable.

I don't really care to be all that productive, but I will certainly enjoy the ride. And when it's all over, nobody can rob me of the pleasure that I had.

[ 20 : 13 ] Another final moment on the range of what do we make of death rather than just the sisters dealing with death, I think we have increasingly in our culture in the West anyway, I can't speak to any other place, we have this kind of rising pugilism that's embedded within a new atheism.

I mean, the elegant and eloquent days of Stephen Hawking even are receding and people are saying, well, in light of death, it's obvious there is no God in this whole idea of faith, and yet there's this evangelistic, pugilistic sense of what to do with life in light of all of those truths.

I'm thinking even of someone like Jerry Coyne on the faculty of the University of Chicago who would evangelistically purport that your endeavors to think about some ontological meaning beyond the evolutionary cycle is detrimental to us moving forward.

Hawking it was in a little more elegant fashion who said, there is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers.

That is a fairy tale for people afraid of the dark. And there's just the slight edge of cynicism 15, 20 years ago that now is full bore and would rid you of anything beyond your decay in the ground.

[ 22 : 18 ] That's the range people. The sisters are dealing with it. The disciples exemplify the range of it from a healthy avoidance to attaching some meaning or not to it.

And then you've got Martha. Look at that character 17 and following she comes into four. The particularity of what she does with it is fascinating.

First of all, I love that it's Martha, not Mary. Martha always gets a bad rap from the other gospel where she was busy at home and, you know, Mary went to the Bible study and Mary did the one thing and Martha really didn't have much to offer because she was just out there working hard.

But here, you know, Martha actually is, she's the one that actually began to see how beautiful a person she really was and how elegant of frame and mind she was.

When she considered death, she was more traditional in a theistic sense. Look at what she says in verse 22 and 24. You'll see the two I know statements.

[ 23 : 25 ] She says, but even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Martha believed there was a God and that God could do something in the present. There's a lot of people that that's what they do with death.

I believe there's a God and if he wanted to do something with my loved one this week he could. And then the second I know statement 24, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

So she had this, she had a belief on okay I've considered death and I believe there's a God and he can prolong that for people when he wants as a gift but I also know that on the final day there will be a resurrection so if he doesn't do something now I believe that God actually does something later.

That's kind of a general theistic sense. Jesus. The sisters are dealing with it. The disciples and Martha present the range of how we think of it.

But look at Jesus. These are some of the most stunning words in the whole gospel. If you've never read the Bible you might have heard these by attending a Christian funeral.

[ 24 : 39 ] Jesus said to her verse 25 I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

I am. This is the seventh time that Jesus makes some claim about himself on a variety of subjects with the term I am.

In other words Martha was saying well I believe that God could do something and I believe on the last day God will do something and Jesus kind of sets that aside and says whoa whoa let's not talk about God for a moment.

I am. And this if you're not a reader of the Bible I should let you know it would be fun for you to this afternoon to go back and read the early part of Exodus where Moses is going to go to deliver Israel from Egypt and he's like well who am I supposed to say sent me?

I mean I'm walking in to try to do something for your people and where's where's your where's your CV? And the response is really fascinating.

[ 26 : 07 ] God says will you tell him I am sent you. The God of your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob I am sent you.

So God when he decides to take on a name takes on the name I am which has this kind of I am that's like just a statement of being.

in other words it reaches as far back as eternity goes and yet it encompasses all of the present and I am moves forward all the way into eternity.

It's almost as if God in the book of Exodus says well you want to know who I what name I am? You're going to have to reach from pole to pole from everlasting to everlasting.

I am. And so God for the Israelite for the Jew this name becomes incredibly sacred because there's no one that stretches from shore to shore.

[ 27 : 13 ] And now this is the seventh time in John's gospel Jesus throws this out. That's his claim. Let me put it this way.

The human condition that the sisters were dealing with is death. He would be wise not to ignore it for long. The range in which people deal with it is demonstrated in the disciples.

But the claim of Jesus is that he is nothing less than an in-breaking a one-off absolute unlike no other.

God son of God come in time to save you from sin and to breach a divide that you had made with the one in heaven.

This is what he says. He says I am the resurrection and the life. He doesn't talk about God he talks about himself. I am the life.

[ 28 : 28 ] He doesn't say it's not like saying I know where to get life and I can go run and get it for you and give it to you. What he's actually saying is I am life.

I am life. Which is what John opened with in John 1-4. In him was life.

This is the claim. So as you wrestle your way through on what to make of death because what you make of death I guarantee you if you think about it long enough it should inform everything you do in life.

Jesus is saying I am the resurrection and the life. Notice this promise. This is a promise if his claim is true that whoever would believe in him though he die yet shall he live.

And notice these shalls. I love that they kept them in the English translation I'm reading from. Verse 26 it flips and everyone who lives believes and believes in me shall never die.

[ 29 : 45 ] though he die yet shall he live. They shall never die. This is the hope of the Christian gospel.

That as we celebrate tomorrow the life of Lisa's mother who would have been 87 on Christmas day we have embraced this claim as her mother did and that though she died yet shall she live because she was attached to the one who is life.

Think of it in terms of an umbilical cord. When you and I are cut loose from an umbilical cord we are cut loose we were cut loose from this source of life and all of humanity when you think of God as life we are detached from him here.

But in Jesus he claims that whoever believes he is that in breaking he's that one off individual he's the sent one who saves all who trust in him you can have life you can call that a fairy tale you can say that I'm afraid of the dark and therefore I hold it but then you make Jesus out to be a liar and if you're willing to make him out to be a liar then that's your decision to move on but for the better part of two millennia there are men and women thoughtful and plain who have grabbed hold of these verses and they shall never die there it is there's the question the question of Martha is the question I leave with you verse 26 do you believe this the human condition the range of our responses the claims of

Jesus and in verse 27 the most stupendous confession she said to him yes Lord I believe that you are the Christ the son of God who is coming into the world what do you make of death tomorrow we will place my mother-in-law on the ground with a belief in a claim that

[ 33 : 19 ] Jesus is life and that one day the dirt that we put in the hole which will settle over time with a big heavy piece on top of it to keep a grave in the ground will give way don't be late to the party you're invited you want to come tomorrow night 7pm western suburbs there's a church college church we're going to kick it off and celebrate what one woman made of death our heavenly father strengthen us this day even as each one here does their best to think their way clear on the most important things given to our existence we pray this in

Jesus name amen to