



May 25: Rising From Grief Into Unshakable Joy | John 11:17-37

Why is waiting so hard?!

Each morning, when I wake up, I wrestle with impatience. Breakfast is a daily test. I pour boiling water—water that took *way* too long to boil—over my so-called "instant" oats, which are *not* really instant.

Each morning, I ask Alexa to set a four-minute timer for my oats to cook. Four minutes. And almost every morning, I break down and ask,

“Alexa? How much time is left?” And I sometimes hear...**“Good morning, Amy. You have 2 minutes and 50 seconds left on your four-minute timer.”**

Which means I was “patient” for a whopping 70 seconds?!

I am not a patient person.

Which is why this story—where Jesus seemingly delays on purpose while a dear friend is dying—is especially hard for someone like me to understand.

Mary and Martha send word to Jesus to come to the bedside of Lazarus who has fallen ill. Jesus knows Lazarus and Mary and Martha. They are all friends. In fact, verse five says, **“...Jesus loved Martha and her sister (Mary) and Lazarus.”**

So, there shouldn't have been a problem. Jesus knew where Lazarus lived, been in their home multiple times, been fed by Mary and Martha. And there wasn't an illness Jesus hadn't healed. He was up for this. No problem.

Except there was a problem.

Because it was at this point that my eye fell upon a weird detail. The kind of detail that maybe only an impatient person would see. When Jesus was sent word and urged to come quickly, he did something very odd. **“...when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.”**

Jesus waited two more days? That's weird. Why didn't it read, **“Jesus took off immediately?”** Is that your definition of being a good friend? Doesn't a friend, a real friend, drop everything to come when you call?

What was Jesus doing that was more important than aiding a friend in urgent need? Bishop Williamson joked, **“Was Jesus on a preaching tour he couldn't step away**

from? Or did Jesus have a 100 other sick people in the que to heal before he could make it to Lazarus?” John doesn't say.

Why did he wait two more whole days?

If I can't wait four minutes for breakfast, can you imagine waiting four days when you are sick?

That must have felt like an eternity to Lazarus, and Mary, and Martha. That must have felt like a lifetime of unnecessary waiting—each hour dragging on, confusion increasing, and then crushing grief.

Why did Jesus make his friends wait?

Our text begins, **“On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.”** Martha meets him. She is understandably broken by her grief, maybe frustrated and confused? Some theologians say she gives Jesus a bit of her mind.

Martha is the one to tell Jesus to his face he is too late. Because of his delay, Lazarus has already been dead for four days, his body doing what bodies do. And she says to Jesus in the King James Version, **“Lord, by this time he stinketh!”**

When the other sister Mary hears Jesus has finally arrived, she comes weeping. When Jesus sees her tears and the weeping of others gathered, he is deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Jesus begins to weep and grieve with them.

Here is one benefit of Jesus' delay. We see his profound empathy and compassion, we see the Son of God mourns with those he loves. Even though he knows Lazarus will rise, he weeps.

But even as he weeps, the onlookers and professional mourners question out loud, **“Why did Jesus wait? Why did Lazarus have to die?”**

I discovered one interesting answer for why Jesus waited. The wait was to prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Lazarus was dead.

In that time, it was a common belief...not so much an orthodox belief, but a widely held belief amongst the Jewish people, that after death the soul lingers near their body. The soul waits, with longing, to return to their body until the fourth day.

On the fourth day, the soul can now see decay in the body and accepts the body is dead. And when the soul sees that, sees there is no more hope, no more doubt, the soul moves on.

Meaning, IF life were ever to come back into this truly dead body, it would be a true miracle. It would be clearly seen and accepted as Divine intervention.

So, by waiting four days, Jesus ensured no one could say Lazarus wasn't truly dead. No one could say he was simply ill or sleeping. This miracle left no doubt. Many would have witnessed this and given God the glory.

But is that the only reason or the best reason? It is an answer, but there is a bigger, fuller answer for us. More is happening here. Jesus was calling for deeper faith from Mary and Martha and his disciples. And from us.

When Jesus and Martha meet, he states in verse 25, "**I am the resurrection and the life.**" Except Martha had already said in verse 24 she believed that Jesus was the Messiah, believed Lazarus would rise in the resurrection. She believed she would see her brother again in the future.

Much like we do...we believe in the last day, we believe in the resurrection, we believe we will see our loved ones.

But notice exactly what Jesus says, "**I am the resurrection and the life.**" Jesus is speaking in present tense...I am not I will be. Jesus is telling Martha he has power over life and death and offers life to all who believe in him.

Jesus wanted to give her something for right now.

What if when Jesus raised Lazarus from death, there was more going on – even more than hope in the resurrection some day or the hope of eternal life after we die?

What if more meaning was being layered on, more significance, more truth, more glory, and more joy?

What if Jesus wanted her to know there was more life available in this life? And Lazarus coming back to life is the proof!

When Jesus said..."**I am the life.**", scholars say this means the moment we put our trust in Jesus we begin to experience that life. A kind of life which cannot be touched by death. And that Jesus is giving Martha a present gift, not simply the promise of life in the future.

It was then I realized I had been believing like Martha, believing in only half a truth. I don't know about you, but when I hear Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, I think...I will be resurrected from my death and will enjoy eternal life after we die.

That Jesus' declaration is all about the future. Don't you?

But that's only the half of it. And who buys half a car? Or half a house? What if the life Christ wants to give us is not just life after death, not just eternal life? Which is really good. But what if there is another half of this truth to consider?

The Bible affirms the resurrection is a future event, and also affirms life in Christ is not just a future promise—it is a present reality.

In Christ, *new life begins now*. When we remember 2 Corinthians 5:17 we say, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”** New life.

And from Galatians, **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”**

And as we have said from the beginning of May, Romans 6:4, **“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too might walk in newness of life.”** Newness of life is meant to be experienced this side of heaven.

In our story for today, that includes Mary and Martha and Lazarus and everyone within smelling distance. Jesus doesn't just help them a little bit or give a little boost to their faith.

No, Jesus skyrocketed them all up from deep grief into the unshakable joy...joy now and joy to come. Joy that is solid and certain.

Jesus helped them rise strong from grief and waiting for the resurrection into a deep well of joy based on a new kind of life this minute.

Grief has probably touched all our lives, even multiple times. Or maybe you are waiting for healing, for reconciliation, for guidance, or inspiration. Maybe you've whispered, **‘Lord, how much longer? Can't you see I am barely holding on?’**

We might need to remind ourselves the Lord's timing is not our timing. And our waiting is not wasted. Often the Lord is at work inside of us and around us, preparing us.

Considering Lazarus, what if in that very space of grieving and waiting...what if new life of unshakable joy is already beginning to rise and Rise, and RISE STRONG within each of us?!”

What if we created space and rhythms and practices to say that to each other? That in the waiting, for some in waiting for their grief to heal and become transformed...new life is already beginning to rise?

Imagine how encouraging that would be?

Speaking it out loud, that Jesus' new life, marked by joy, hope, and abundant provision comes but often only after our dependence on the Lord is deepened and more fully formed in us. Then God's goodness comes and God's good things do come to those who wait.

It is taking way too long to become a patient person. Thursday morning, I was eating breakfast and I heard a timer go off. As I chewed my rather chewy oatmeal, I asked myself, "**Huh, what's that timer for?**"

Yep, you guessed it. I forgotten I had set a timer. I had forgotten to wait four minutes before I ate my oatmeal. Lord, have mercy!

So, I may not become great at waiting, but I am learning a little about this life in Christ. Will someone help me take off my grave cloths?

And, tomorrow morning, when I again ask Alexa, "**How much time is left on my timer?**"

My heart might wonder a little, "**How much time until I see new life in my grief? Or when will I see new life and know unshakable joy in that relationship?**"

And as I journal, I might remind myself, "**Even as you wait, Amy. And even as I grieve...new life is coming, new life is rising strong in me! Amen.**"

As we move into a Time of Reflection: Remember when Jesus asked Martha if she believed if he was the resurrection and the life?

How might Jesus be asking you that same question? Not just about future resurrection and eternal life after you die, but also about new life available to you here and now?

Where can you see a glimmer or feel an inkling that even in grief new life is rising and coming forth...in you and in this church?