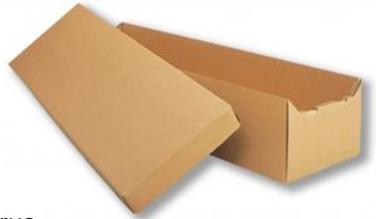


Jesus is the Christ (from John's gospel) # 36 (Matters of Life & Death # 2)

## John 11<sup>17-27</sup>

# When grief & hope encounter Jesus



Martha's conversation with Jesus concerning Lazarus

### Pray

**Feedback** I'm getting from **Life Groups**:

- system is working well so far;
  - people are immersing themselves in text:
    - not simply answering Qs put before them;
    - but coming up w own Qs from the text;
      - then searching text together for answers;
  - then on Sunday coming
    - wanting to see whether answers are confirmed / clarified / extended;
    - whether I can see what they have seen;
    - pulling threads together – see cohesive patterns / principles;
- ⇒ makes for maturity in your discipleship – learning / growing;
- you see for yourself that God speaks to you directly thru His word;
  - have that confirmed / clarified / encouraged on Sunday;

If you wanting to grow as much as you can in relationship w Lord

⇒ you'd be doing yourself a favour plugging into one of Life groups this week.

Children – your children's talk was **Problem of putting people in a box**;

- one problem – pain / anguish of separation from loved one.
- but I said : ∃ another problem w putting people in box:
  - phrase “*putting person in a box*” can mean giving a person a **label** that sticks, putting in box that defines them;
    - some people get put in box labelled young upstart / tattooed rebel;
    - other people get put in box of old fuddy-duddy;
    - other people get put in box of foreigner;
    - other people simply get put in too hard / too difficult box.

Our text in **John 11** has something to say to us about this problem of putting person in box:

- in fact already evident last week
- we tend to put **Thomas in box** – labelled “doubting Thomas”
  - incident of doubting resurrection taken to define him.

## There's more to Thomas

Saw last week:

(16) Thomas said to his fellow disciples, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*"

- not "doubting Thomas" now – but "courageous Thomas."
- **one attribute** / one **incident** not necessarily define him;
- he deeper / more multi-dimensional than that.

This week focus is on **women** – **Mary** & esp **Martha**;

- again I think we tend to have stereotype:
- Mary is devoted one – sits at Jesus' feet – learn from Him;
- Martha is distracted one
- who busies herself w things she thinks are important – but aren't at time.

Text today again **confronts** us w our **stereotyping** – putting people in boxes:

## There's more to Martha & Mary

This time it is **Martha** who is one who is found first in **close company w Jesus**;

- Martha is one who, as soon as she heard Jesus was coming – went out to meet Him;

This time it is **Mary** who holds back – remains w all other mourners in house.

What I think we see is:

- **challenge** to our tendency to **put people in a box**;
- people in Bible are more multi-dimensional than we might at first think;
- must be careful not to characterise them on basis on 1 incident / encounter;
- same applies in present day;
- too easy to put people in box;
- this person is conservative / resistant to change – stuck in ways;
- that person is always pushing envelope / bucking the status quo;
- our assumptions / presumptions about them influence how we interact/ listen;
- if we think we know how Jack is going to respond,
- ⇒ less inclination to really listen to what Jack is saying;
- **challenge** to us to communicate / interact in wholesome / holistic way.

Let's get into **actual encounter** John recorded for us:

## Martha's meeting with Jesus in private

(11<sup>17-24</sup>)

Let me remind you where we **up to in story**;

- Mary / Martha / Lazarus are 2 sisters / brother – close friends w Jesus;
- Lazarus fell seriously sick;
- sisters sent message to Jesus: "**Lord, he whom you love is ill.**"
- hoping that Jesus could help;
- Jesus declared : "**This illness is not unto death / not end in death**"
- presumably messenger returned straight away w good news;
- but by time messenger returned Lazarus had died;
- we know this because we told: Lazarus now been in tomb 4 days;
- Jesus had lingered for 2 days – messenger 2 days ahead;
- can imagine turmoil 2 sisters would be in.

## (Grief &amp; hope in turmoil &amp; tension)

Let's **hear it from Martha** herself:

(21) **Martha said to Jesus,**

*"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

(22) *But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."*

- I think we hear at least 2 things there:

- in 1<sup>st</sup> sentence – grief;

- in 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence – hope;

What does she actually mean?

How do they go together?

Interesting to ponder alongside what psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross suggested re grief:

- she spoke of 5 stages of grief:

**Denial / Anger / Bargaining / Depression / Acceptance**

- but sometimes misunderstood as if like 5 stations on tram line;

- 1<sup>st</sup> one - then next – then next then next;

- more like 5 components of circle – divide circle into 5 areas:

Denial / Anger / Bargaining / Depression / Acceptance;

- then its like that circle is tub in washing machine;

- you're in the clothes in the middle;

- being tossed this way – then that way – this this way;

- tossed about between 5 areas in random sort of way

- turmoil of heart;

- tension between conflicting thoughts / feelings / desires.

I think this is what we see here in Martha:

- **grief & hope in turmoil & tension:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> sentence: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

- sounds to me like deep disappointment;

- maybe ∃ discouragement / dejection / even depression;

- maybe ∃ acceptance that in circumstances nothing could've been done;

- even if Jesus had come straight away – would've died before got here;

- only way it could have been different if Jesus had already been here

when Lazarus fell ill – but He wasn't – maybe just accept that.

- or maybe ∃ real sense of disappointment / disillusionment with Jesus Himself;

- How could He say Lazarus would not die – but he did die?

- Did Jesus not know?

- Did Jesus not have power / control?

- Did Jesus not care?

- ∃ no indication that she angry w Jesus;

- but who knows - might have been element of that in there;

- Why didn't Jesus come straight away anyway?

- OK may not have changed outcome

- but at least we'd know He tried / cared;

- How could Jesus get it wrong – what does this tell me about Him?

- maybe confused / bewildered – What am I to make of all this?

- 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence: *But even now I know : whatever you ask from God, God will give you”*  
What does she mean?

### Is she simply saying: she **not given up on Jesus**?

- yes, it looks like He failed in His bid to stop Lazarus dying;
- but she has nowhere else to go – still trusts Him to speak on her behalf to God.

### Or is she **hinting / hoping** : Jesus will **raise Lazarus from dead right now**?

- some say maybe she is;
- some say maybe not
  - because when Jesus says He will rise;
  - she seems to take it as referring to resurrection at end of time;
  - later on when Jesus said Take away the stone from Lazarus’ tomb
    - she cautioned Him – there’d be stench from decomposing body;
- I don’t think we can be definitive;
- not everything is going to be processed in linear / logical fashion;
- grief is not like that;
- grief is chaotic / confused – like being tossed about in tub;
- what I think we see here is grief & hope in turmoil/ tension;
- Martha is all over the place - really struggling w what this is all about;
  - rollercoaster of conflicting thoughts / feelings / doubts / hopes.

Jesus **meets Martha in her turmoil / tension** – of grief & hope;

- Jesus meets Martha personally / privately / individually;
- I think ∃ portrayal here of Jesus’ meeting each of us where we at;
  - not where we should be;
  - not all organised / systematised / logical / lucid;
  - meeting us where we are in messiness of life / loss;
- if you are in turmoil of heart over anything in your life;
  - be comforted / be encouraged / be assured:
    - Jesus will meet you in midst of mess;
    - know : He is coming - go to Him
      - as Martha when Jesus was coming - went out alone to meet Him;
      - go alone – just you & Him – He is One to come alongside.

Now what is it : **Jesus says**?

(23) Jesus said to her, *"Your brother will rise again."*

(24) Martha said to Him,

*"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."*

With Jesus ...

## Grief & hope look to the resurrection

Jesus sets before grieving Martha **hope of resurrection**;

- as usual – He not lay it all out on table – all at once
  - simply says: **He will rise** – no indication of when / what / where / how;
  - He intrigues / entices – draws her in – draws us in;
    - she wants to know more – we want to know more.

When she says: "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*"

- she is stating orthodox view of Bible-believing Jews of the day – not all believed;
- like today  $\exists$  evangelical Jews who believe Bible is word of God – all true;
  - $\exists$  liberal Jews who said only parts of it are true;
  - liberals of day were Sadducees – denied resurrection;

Martha believed Biblical teaching - resurrection at last day

Q tho is : Is she **hinting at more** than this?

- Is she effectively saying "I know he will rise in last day – but is there more?"
- Is she hinting because she dare not appear presumptuous enough to ask outright?
- Is she hinting because she cannot bring herself to hope for something so immediate
  - so miraculous / so momentous?
- Is she hinting because  $\exists$  glimmer of hope deep in heart – that maybe  $\exists$  more?

Out of the emotional turmoil of grief /hope in her heart

- Martha is **looking for meaning** – something solid.

If we go back to psychologists and their 5 aspects of grief in turmoil of washing machine

- I think it is really interesting:

Kubler-Ross's co-author **David Kessler** adapted/extended model w **6<sup>th</sup> aspect**:  
 - meaning – hope to emerge at end – meaning.

This is exactly what **only Jesus can provide** – actually has already provided in v beginning:

(4) "*This illness is not unto / not end in death.*"

*It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*"

= ultimate meaning – but we want to / Jesus wants us to unpack this;

- so move on;

- hear more of what Jesus has to say in response to Martha's implied Q re resurrection

(25) Jesus said to her, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*"

*Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live,*

(26) *and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.*"

I've called this ...

## Jesus' manifestation of Himself to Martha

(11<sup>25-26</sup>)

### "I AM the resurrection & the life"

Do you see how Jesus is **transforming** the whole concept of **resurrection**?

- Martha been thinking about resurrection as a future event – at last day / end of time;
- maybe she also thinking of resurrection as possible immanent event;  
 - 2 events
- Jesus says **resurrection is a person** before it can ever be an event;  
 - **I AM the resurrection** - this is a profound concept;
- resurrection as a person.

Jesus is saying **in Him is life**;

- not only life
- but resurrected life;
- life from the dead;
- life that overcomes power of death;
- life that overwhelms physical / spiritual / eternal death;

**Is this the most profound declaration?**

I'm thinking of His **7 I AM** statements:

- I am the bread of life
- I am the true vine;
- I am the door;
- I am the good shepherd;
- I am the light of the world;
- I am the way, the truth & the life – that's deep
- I am the resurrection & life – 7<sup>th</sup> of 7 signs in John;
  - I think this is a culmination / climax;
  - I think this is most profound of all 7 statements.

What I want you to notice now is this:

- **to whom** did he make this most profound of all declarations concerning Himself;
- not to the multitudes – not to all the mourners – but specifically to one person:
  - that one person was a woman – Martha.

V interesting : Jesus **reserves this revelation for her**;

- Jesus manifests Himself most profoundly to Martha;
- might have chosen men to be His disciples / apostles / sent out ones
  - to start / lead / look over His fledgling church;
- they all men,
- but He honours a woman w most profound declaration of Him being resurrection.

*"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?*

- it is you singular – you Martha;
- firstly & foremostly this is for you – *Do you believe this?*

Then through her it **extends to everyone else**:

*Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live,*  
*and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."*

Jesus now teaching us :

Him being resurrection has v real personal profound implications for believer;

- if this is you
  - tho you die – yet you shall live
  - you who lives shall never die;
- double paradox – profound truth / reality of life in Jesus;

Jesus' Q to Martha is also Q to each of us *"Do you believe this?"*

- crucial Q we must answer - do answer by way we live our life

(27) [Martha] said to him,

*"Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,  
who is coming into the world."*

I call this ...

## Martha's magnificent confession of faith

(11<sup>27</sup>)

**"You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world"**

I ask:

- amongst all the pre-resurrection confessions of who Jesus is ...

Is this the most profound declaration of all?

Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?"

- they told him: "John the Baptist; others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets"
- He asked them: "But who do you say that I am?"
  - Peter is the one who speaks up:
  - Mark records his answer as "You are the Christ." – 8(29)
  - Luke records Peter's answer: "The Christ of God." – 9(20)
  - Matthew records it as "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 16(16)
- regarded as great confession – it is:

Jesus answered him,

*"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!*

*For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,  
but my Father who is in heaven.*

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church,  
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

- church of JC is built on those making this confession of faith.

**Peter** declared: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

**Martha** declared: *You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*

I'd suggest to you: in many respects **Martha's confession** is even **more profound** than Peter's

- she proclaims that Jesus is the coming one:
  - the incarnation of God;
  - He has come - but He is coming – more yet to be revealed;
  - He is coming into the world – this world – her world – your world;
  - Martha looking in faith / believing / receiving.

And remember **were Martha is coming from**;

- moment ago she was in turmoil & tension between grief & hope;
- but deep down she knew: no matter what happened - she was loved by Jesus;
- out of that love – amidst all turmoil / tension - arises by gift / grace of God:
  - perhaps clearest / most profound pre-resurrection declaration  
ever uttered concerning Jesus identity;
- certainly not just copied from Peter;
- flesh & blood had not revealed this to her – but her Father in heaven.

I'd suggest to you:

- it v significant: God saw fit to put this profound confession of faith on **lips of woman**
- God honours women ambassadors of Christ;
  - appointed by Jesus to different roles from men like 12 disciples
    - but complementary;
    - by no means inferior – in some ways superior.

(Conclusion)

There's certainly **more to Martha** than I realised before this week in this text;

- not some 1-dimensional woman who simply serves in background;
- I now see her as woman of many magnificent gifts/ graces; adorn the gospel of God
- maybe you've also seen something in her not seen before.

Ultimately not all about Martha – instrument in God's hands here;

- there's more to you too;
- no one is 1-dimensioal individual before God;
- no one belongs in a simplistic box;

There's more to you ...

There's more **for** you

Jesus says to **you individually** / you **collectively**:

*Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live,  
and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.*

There's more **from** you

You all have **vital part to play** in unfolding drama of God at work in world.

- how good is that!

Pray

**Sing** You are the glorious Christ, the greatest of all delights ...

**Lord's Supper** – Shattered death

**Benediction** – Rev 1(5,6)