

that you may **BELIEVE**

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

John 11 | March 13, 2016

Prepared by Rev. Curtis A. Bronzan, ThM
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series *That You May Believe*, encountering Jesus' ability to bring life to the dead.

II. Connecting with One Another

Where have you experienced the new life of Jesus?

How have you seen other Christians exhibit it?

III. Study the Text

- a. Near the outset of our study of John's gospel, we engaged Jesus' first public miracle at a wedding in Cana (if you need a refresher, turn to John 2.1-12). You may recall that Jesus' turning water into wine at a wedding pointed back to promises in the Hebrew Scriptures that God would be like a husband to Israel as His wife. John 2.11 states, "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

Now, however, in John 11, our attention is turned to a funeral, foreshadowing Jesus' own death. In fact, this will be Jesus' final public appearance before the crucifixion.

Why do you think Jesus' story went this way? Why did Jesus' public ministry start with a joyous wedding and conclude with a heartrending funeral?

What does the trajectory of this narrative tell us about Jesus' first century reception?

- b. Read John 11.1-6 (don't read onto verse 7, yet!).

John presupposes his audience knows both this story and those who were involved. What do you know about this story? If you're working through this study in a group, spend some time to discuss the context and the main characters: Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

Though John 11-12 contains the only New Testament reference to Lazarus, we can learn more about his sisters Mary and Martha in Luke 10.38-42, and Mary's anointing of Jesus (referenced in John 11.2) in parallel accounts: John 12.1-8, Matthew 26.6-13 and Mark 14.3-9 (contrast what is most likely a different event in Luke 7.36-39).

- c. We can glean three pieces of information about this family: First, that they were good friends with Jesus (again, recall Luke 10.38-42). Secondly, lack of reference to their parents reveals that, in all likelihood, their parents had previously passed away.

Third, they were probably well-to-do (especially considering Mary's anointing), though Lazarus' death would have been a terrible blow to their financial situation and his sisters' social security.

How do these three pieces of information help you understand the request to Jesus (in verse 3)? What do you make of Jesus' response (in verse 4)?

- d. One commentator explains the situation this way: "To *have* shame is a good thing. Shame is an expression of commitment to civility, a sign one is both civilized and sensitive to the needs of the community. It is an indication that one knows how to control unwieldy and potentially devastating emotions or actions for the sake of maintaining and preserving good social relations. To *be* shamed, however, is not a good thing. Shameful situations are those that contribute to the breakdown of a civilized community. One example is an unneighborly marriage celebration (where wine runs out). Another is an unsatisfying death (being buried without key friends in attendance)."

What do you think of this commentator's connection between the wedding in John 2 and the funeral in John 11?

How do you expect Jesus to respond to this shameful situation? Why?

- e. Reread John 11.5-6, then continue onto verse 7.

In John's gospel, Jesus' delay serves three purposes: First, to reveal Jesus' power to bring life out of death (even after three days - hint, hint!). Second, to bring honor to God. And third, to bring honor to Jesus.

Would you have understood this if you were one of Jesus' earthly disciples?

Would you have understood this if you were in Mary and Martha's shoes? Why or why not?

Have you ever had an experience like this, where you wished God would "show up" sooner?

- f. Read John 11.8-16.

The reply of Jesus' disciples in verse 8 recalls John 10.31-39, where the religious authorities perceive Jesus' claim to be the Son of God as a dishonor to God. In trying to apprehend and stone him, they are seeking to honor God.

After some back and forth, in verses 14-15 Jesus says, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." It has been written, "Note once again that Jesus' dynamic dawdling is directed to the faith of his disciples ("that you may believe"). The term *believe*... stands in for loyalty and solidarity with Jesus."

What do you make of this statement? How would you have reacted if you were one of his disciples?

Of course, we want everything on our timetable. And yet, how has God's timing prompted a deeper faith in your own spiritual journey?

- g. Reread John 11.16.

Three times John reminds us of Thomas' nickname, which meant "twin." Nicknames were important in the ancient Mediterranean world, as they were believed to help protect against the "evil eye" that Paul discussed in his sermon on Sunday, February 28th (it was believed that a dangerous darkness came out of people's eyes).

In light of all that, what do you make of Thomas' statement? Does it help explain why he's the brave one? And yet, what does he think will happen if they return to Judea?

h. Read John 11.17-27.

It was believed by some that a person's life force hovered above the body for three days after death, only fully departing on the fourth day. Further, note in verse 19 that "many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother." While it was rare to leave the home during the month of mourning, Martha goes out to Jesus.

How does this underscore Martha's statement in verse 21? Some scholars believe it reveals a rebuke for not arriving sooner. What do you think?

- i. Verses 22 and 24 are very telling: Martha sees Jesus as an intermediary to God, but not as God in the flesh. He could have been used *by* God to heal, if only he'd arrived in time! Even in verse 27, "she does not repeat the terms Jesus has used, but she combines two of the most common titles used for Jesus in this Gospel. It would seem she does not really grasp what Jesus is saying... her use of more common titles may be a sign that she has not understood him." (Notice also, in verse 28, that she calls Jesus the "teacher")

Where do you see this "not really grasping" about Jesus in our world today?

How do you "not really grasp" Jesus' identity in your own life?

j. Read John 11.28-44.

In verse 35 we encounter the shortest verse in all of Scripture: "Jesus wept." But *why* did Jesus weep? Was Jesus weeping because Lazarus had died? Was he saddened by others pain? Was he troubled by their lack of faith?

What do you think?

k. Read John 11.45-54.

Though some believe in him (verse 45), the religious authorities hatch a plan to kill Jesus. Why do they do so?

IV. Pray

- a. Though their faith is not perfectly orthodox, Mary and Martha do call out to Jesus for the healing of their brother. Lift up those you know who are still spiritually "in the grave",
- b. Ask God to give Good Shepherd a bold faith in Jesus, as the Lord and Giver of Life,
- c. Pray for our high school students and adult advisors who are preparing to serve the people of Ensenada, Mexico over Spring Break.