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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“The RESURRECTION, The LIFE”

John 11:1-44

? How much time do we have? To put it another way, how much *life* do we have?

⌚ Time is not merely the system we use to measure earthly existence; it is the *substance* of that existence. To be alive is to *have* time – or, better yet, to *experience* it. Time is our great treasure, great gift, great blessing.

⌚ It is also our burden, our bane, our curse. For while time is the measure and substance of earthly existence it is, equally, the *substance and sign* of creaturely *mortality*.

☑ {Fellini; Boucicault} The phrase ‘gone before their time’ conveys our distress when death strikes early; yet time itself is an agent of death, for **“Death hides in clocks.”** We **“talk of killing time, while time gently kills [us].”**

? How much time do we have? How much *life* do we have? Only God knows.

☑ Please turn with me to John 11:1-44.

■ Christ’s close friend Lazarus is critically ill. In verse 3 his sisters send urgent word about his condition: **“Lord, the one you love is sick.”** Their age-old home remedies are useless. The high-priced doctor is of no help. Barring divine intervention, Lazarus will not recover.

Thus, **“Lord, the one you love is sick”** is not just the latest news. It is a heartfelt plea, an earnest prayer with a tinge of desperation.

Can’t you see the women wringing their hands, holding their breath, calculating and recalculating how long it will take for Jesus to come and take action?

? Have you been there? Has disease or injury or some other danger ever backed you into a corner?

Modern medicine is astounding. Even so, there comes a time when it cannot do anything for us, when all that is left for us to do is to cry out to God.

Time is always of the essence, but sometimes more so. How long till the test results come back? How long till the ambulance gets here? Will my loved one hang on long enough for me to say goodbye?

This is one of those occasions. Mary and Martha are acutely aware of the clock. They assume the Savior will make haste.

■ He does not. When he learns that Lazarus is sick (verses 6-7) **“he [stays] where he [is] two more days ... then he [tells] his disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea.’”**

{Jn 10:40; 1:28} **“Where he [is],”** is **“the place where John [baptized] in the early days.”** Scholars have not yet pinpointed the precise location, but we know it is near **“Bethany on the other side of the Jordan.”**

{Jn 11:18} Meanwhile, Lazarus lies dying in another village called Bethany. We *do* know where *this* town is: it is **“less than two miles from Jerusalem,”** just off the road to Jericho. This puts it roughly twenty miles west of the Jordan River, as the crow flies.

Messiah gets the message that his friend is deathly ill but remains **“where he is”** for two more days. He does not set out till after forty-eight precious hours have passed.

In the interim, Mary and Martha are left to wonder: Has the Master heard? Does he understand how sick Lazarus is? Has he been unavoidably detained?

‡ Have you been there? Have you taken your heart - ache to God *and waited*, asked *and waited*, cried out *and waited*, pleaded *and waited*?

{Ps 22:2} David speaks for us when he laments, **“My God, my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”**

■ Jesus finally arrives in verse 17, but by then **“Lazarus [has] already been in the tomb for four days.”**

“Four days” is a culturally significant period of time. Most first century Jews believe the soul lingers near the body for three days after death, hoping to return to it. Then, on the fourth day, it leaves forever.

Lazarus has been buried **“for four days.”** That seals it: he is undeniably, irreversibly, hopelessly dead, with no possibility of coming back. His time is up. His days have passed, and with them his life.

“In the tomb for four days.” Lazarus might as well have died a thousand years ago.

■ No wonder Martha greets Messiah the way she does! In verses 20-21 she goes **“out to meet him”** on the outskirts of Bethany. **“Lord,”** Martha says, **“If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

■ A short while later, in verse 32, Mary **“[falls] at his feet and”** repeats her sister’s words: **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

It is a dirge, a complaint, and an accusation all rolled into one: **“If you had been here,”** if you had not taken so long, if you had not delayed, Lazarus would have had more time!

⌚ The sisters are not incorrect. We are flotsam in the current, dust in the wind. Time is the conundrum of our existence. We cannot live without it – but eventually we cannot live *with* it.

‡ Oh Lord, why didn’t you show up sooner? Why did you let time have its way?

■ Martha’s anguish is mingled with conviction: **“If you had been here my brother would not have died”** (verse 21). **“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask”** (verse 22).

Notice that protest is not inherently incompatible with authentic faith. When we are in anguish, it can be how we engage with the Lord instead of giving up on him. If we are seeking God, our words of complaint will not separate us from him; they will draw us closer to him.

■ Now Christ speaks directly into Martha’s situation and ours: ²⁵ **“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”**

- Then he reveals his power. Verses 38-44:

Jesus ...deeply moved, [comes] to the tomb. It [is] a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he [says].

“But, Lord,” [answers] Martha... “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

...Jesus [replies], “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” So they [remove] the stone.

Jesus prays and commands: **“Lazarus, come out!”** The formerly **“dead man [emerges],”** not as a re-animated corpse but as a vital human being! Jesus is, indeed, **“the resurrection and the life”!**

? What truths does this event reveal? What action does it equip us for?

✍ First, Messiah cares.

■ When Jesus sees Mary **“and the Jews who [have] come along with her... weeping,”** (verse 33), **“he [is] deeply moved in spirit and troubled.”**

📖 He is **“deeply moved.”** The Greek term can describe either grief or anger. It might be both here: sorrow at the loss of a friend, and wrath at death’s cruel impact on all humanity.

📖 He is **“troubled.”** The original Greek is a potent word; he is intensely **“agitated, distressed.”**

■ He makes no effort to conceal his anguish. In verse 35, **“Jesus [weeps].”**

{Jn 1:1-3} The deific Word **“was with God in the beginning”** because he *is* God. He existed before all of Creation since all of Creation was **“made” “through him.”**

☑ Do you know what a mayfly is? It is an insect that rarely lives longer than 24 hours after it hatches. The Eternal Son could be excused for looking at Lazarus – at all of us – the way we look at mayflies.

He does not. He is really affected by Lazarus’ death – so moved, agitated and distressed that he openly weeps!

★ Jesus cares. Hence, we can trust his intentions toward us. This is our action step.

✍ Second, Messiah has power over time and death, and he is using it to give life.

{Jn 10:10; Ro 6:3-5} This was why he became one of us. He declares, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** This *fullness* of life is spiritual and also physical: **“All ... who were baptized into Christ Jesus were ... buried with him through baptism into death in order that ... we too may live a new life. If we have been united with in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”**

When he returns, he will usher in a new reality. **“There will be no more death or mourning or crying**

or pain, for the old order of things” – including the tyranny of time – “[will have] **passed away.**”

Jesus is using his power over time and death to give life. Hence, we can dare to hope in him. This is our action step.

✎ Third, Messiah’s care and life-giving power are often not plain to mortal eyes.

■ We know from verse 42 that Christ let Lazarus die in order to raise him, thereby proving his Sonship and glorifying his Father; but he did not notify Martha and Mary of his plans. All they knew was that he dragged his feet, and their brother died as a result.

At least they got him back! Many do not.

Who can say whom the Almighty will, and will not, grant fullness of earthly life? Who can explain with certitude why he does what he does when he does it?

I am not insinuating that the Lord does not care, lacks power, or does not give life. I am stating that his care, power, and giving of life are not always evident.

★ Hence, we must exercise humility in our demands on God and our claims about God. This is our action step.

? How much time do we have? How much *life* do we have? How near is death? Only God knows.

We do know this: our Savior cares for us. He is using his power over time and death to give us life. Trust, hope, and humility are the appropriate response.

May we find vitality, abundant and eternal, in the Lord Jesus! He is **“the resurrection and the life.”**

John 11:1-44 is the Word of the Lord.