

## Sermon for Sunday 22 March 2026 – Harwell Morning Worship

Readings: John 11: 1-45 and Romans 8: 6-11

### The Raising of Lazarus

Prayer: Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus. To reach out and touch him and say that we love him. Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen. O open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.

#### [Slide 1]

“I am the resurrection and the life” says the Lord. “Those who believe in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”. Many of us will have heard or said those words at a funeral as they remind us of the hope we have in Jesus because, through his death and resurrection, death has been defeated and we can live eternally with Jesus when we believe and trust in him.

Last week, Stephen spoke about Jesus’ healing of the man who had been born blind (John 9). This week, we hear of an even greater miracle, or sign as the gospel writer John calls miracles. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

Lazarus lived in Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, and was the brother of Martha and Mary. Bethany means ‘house of the poor’ or ‘house of affliction’. The family was not a poor one, though. In fact Martha, Mary and Lazarus were wealthy - but they might well have opened their home as a kind of hospice to care for the afflicted. The house in Bethany belonged to Martha and the family welcomed Jesus there many times for rest and retreat. Jesus clearly loved the sisters and their brother.

[Slide 2] Lazarus was sick and the sisters sent word to Jesus to let him know of the illness afflicting Lazarus whom they described as ‘the one you love’ (verse 3). They didn’t ask him to come to their brother’s sickbed but they merely let him know about the situation. Perhaps this is something we could learn – we don’t necessarily have to ask the Lord to help and give him all the details - even less

tell him what he should do! Just naming the issue and laying it before Jesus is all we need to do. We can trust Jesus to do what is right in our situation.

At the time of Lazarus' illness, Jesus was with his disciples on the other side of the river Jordan. Despite the sad news, Jesus stayed where he was for another two days and didn't head for Bethany straightaway. In fact, he said that 'this sickness will not end in death' (verse 4). Well, Lazarus did die, but Jesus was looking beyond his death to something marvellous happening which would glorify his Heavenly Father.

After two days Jesus called his disciples to go to Judea with him but his followers were alarmed as the Jews in Judea had previously stoned him there. Jesus was able to see beyond the darkness of illness and fear for his own life and he pressed on, walking in the light, to his friend's bedside. He told his disciples that his friend had fallen asleep and they took this literally to mean that Lazarus was only sleeping but would wake up. Jesus then told them that Lazarus was dead but he was aware that something really wonderful was going to follow because he was regularly in communion with his Father through prayer.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead and buried in a tomb for 4 days. On his arrival, Martha went out to meet Jesus [Slide 3] while Mary stayed at home with the many people who had come to comfort the sisters. Martha almost reproached Jesus for not being there but still expressed her faith that God would give Jesus whatever he asked for even in the face of death.

Then Jesus pronounced those famous words [Slide 4] "I am the resurrection and the life". Martha thought he meant that Lazarus would rise 'on the last day' – at the end of time. But Jesus knew that Lazarus would rise imminently.

Martha affirmed her faith in Jesus – that he was the Christ (or Messiah), the Son of God.

Martha called her sister Mary who got up immediately to go to Jesus. The people who had come to comfort the sisters followed her to the place where Jesus was – and they would witness an amazing sign.

Like her sister, Mary virtually reproached Jesus for not being with them when their brother died. But she fell at his feet and addressed him as 'Lord'. She too loved and believed in Jesus.

When Jesus witnessed the depth of grief in the sisters and those who had come to support them, he too wept [Slide 5]. Jesus was human as well as divine and he felt the full force of raw grief that those around him felt.

Some of the people observing the situation questioned why Jesus, who could open the eyes of a blind man, could not have healed Lazarus and prevented him from dying.

Jesus asked for the stone across the tomb to be moved [Slide 6]. Practical Martha pointed out that Lazarus had been dead 4 days and that there would be a terrible smell as a result of decomposition of the body. Jesus reassured her that God would be glorified through what would happen next. The stone was rolled away, Jesus prayed to his Heavenly Father, and called Lazarus from the tomb [Slide 7]. Lazarus came out of the tomb still in his grave clothes. There was no sign of decomposition even after 4 days, and Lazarus really was alive. As a result of this sign, or miracle, many of the Jewish people who had witnessed this extraordinary scene came to believe in him. I wonder whether some of them had been in the crowds who had tried to stone Jesus a short time before?

There is much we can learn from this sign of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

We can learn the importance of **praying** and **waiting**, trusting that Jesus will do what is right for us in his perfect time and in his perfect way. He can overturn our expectations. Although Martha and Mary were sorry that Jesus had not been with them when Lazarus was ill, they still trusted that he would do what was right – and he did more than they could possibly have imagined. When we think that our prayers are not being answered, that nothing is happening, let us not lose heart but understand that his ways are not our ways.

We can also learn to **stay close to Jesus** and not operate under our own understanding. Even if we are walking towards the jaws of death, we can still walk with Jesus into the light of eternity.

We can learn to trust that when we belong to Christ ***we are alive because of the righteousness that he gives us***. Our bodies are destined to die because of sin, as Paul reminded the Romans in chapter 8 verse 10, but our spirits will remain alive because of Jesus.

As we reflect on the events in Bethany, at the ‘house of affliction’, the ‘house of the poor’, let us remember that it was in that same house that Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with precious oil and dried them with her hair [Slide 8]. This is recorded in the very next chapter of John’s gospel, chapter 12. This act of generosity and humility was done to prepare Jesus for his death.

And the death and resurrection of Jesus would spell the defeat of death for those who believe in him. [Slide 9] In the words of Jesus “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”. And to quote further from Jesus’ subsequent words ‘Do you believe this?’