

St. John 11:14-16

Then Jesus told them (his disciples) plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE

The dead are raised.

Most people do *not* believe this. Look at the cover of today's bulletin. What do you think? Which way are you leaning – in the direction of the growing number of skeptics who scoff at the idea, who think this is it, that when death comes life is over, and there is nothing more ... or in the way of hope and Christian faith that see Christ as the resurrection and the life (v. 25), the beginning of a brand new life that never ends in the presence of almighty God, a blessed everlasting life that promises to be better with much more than we could ever imagine? Now, before we answer the question, let's take a look at this issue of life after death from the unique perspective of --

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE.

His name is Lazarus. In Greek (*Lazaros*) means: *God has helped*, which could be good or bad, depending on how his story is interpreted. Incidentally, the only place he is mentioned is right here in chapters 11-12 of John's Gospel. Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha, and a close friend of Jesus. The latter is a conclusion drawn from the narrative itself, which not only describes the emotional feelings the Lord had for his dear friend from the village of Bethany, but says so in two words. I'm sure most of us have probably memorized the shortest verse of the Bible: *Jesus wept* (v. 35) for --

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE.

Let's recall the story.

The job approval rating of Jesus at this time is falling rapidly. His popularity has become a liability for the religious authorities. There is a plot brewing to have him put to death as soon as possible. While the details are being worked out, Jesus and his disciples continue to mingle among the crowds gathered to hear his message of salvation. From the context of today's text, it is clear that when the news about Lazarus reaches Jesus, he and his disciples are where his ministry began three years ago – on the eastern banks of the Jordan River where he was recognized by John the Baptist as *the Lamb of God* who takes away the sin of the world! (1:29) The news isn't good ... Lazarus is gravely ill, but Jesus is not alarmed. Something else is going on; something much more important than the obvious gravity generated by the situation. As we read from the eyewitness account, note the way Jesus responds! It is most curious ...

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

(verses 5-7)

We can only imagine how his disciples must have reacted. They are not eager to go back into the brewing cauldron of hostility sponsored by the religious authorities. They remind Jesus that he has survived one assassination attempt, so why would he even dare to go back? (v. 8) Jesus reminds them that this is about Lazarus (v. 14) --

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE.

... and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.
(v. 15)

The reply from Thomas is incredible! Most of us would never credit “doubting” Thomas with words of such courage and devotion. But he is the only one who expresses unwavering support for the idea of going back into the danger zone. Maybe he is only acting – he was nicknamed the Twin because he apparently looked like Jesus. His words could have been a sarcastic acceptance of the reality before them. Going back would be suicide! So, he says to them ... (*sigh*) okay, let’s go so we can die with him! (v. 16)

But the dead are raised!

Indeed. The story goes on. When they get to Bethany, two miles east of the capital city of Jerusalem, there is the customary disturbance over death, including the professional mourners and the grieving of family and friends (v. 33). Jesus is not happy with the scene he encounters. The word (Gk: *enebrimesato*) means *deeply moved*, which **suggests** that when our Lord sees the heartache and grief caused by the intrusion of death he is *irritated* ... even to the point of being *angry* with the situation.

Lazarus has been dead in the tomb for four days. This is a significant point because of the prevailing rabbinic tradition that the soul hovered near the body for only three days; then departed when decomposition started. When Jesus calls his friend by name and tells him to come out, there is no doubt – this is a miracle! If he hadn’t called him by name, all the dead buried at Bethany would have risen! But in this story ...

God has helped Lazarus --

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE.

Now, for those wondering about this title, consider one final passage in the wake of this amazing resurrection from the dead. I didn’t just make this up. Scripture records yet another plot among the religious authorities. After this miracle ...

The chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

(John 12:10-11)

Talk about eliminating the competition!

There is only one thing left for Jesus to do. Re-enter the city amidst cries of *Hosanna*, (*Lord, save us, help us!*) the ancient greeting for the king of Israel, and finish the job of redemption – once and for all – as the sacrificial Lamb of God sent to take away the sins of the whole world! This Jesus does after demonstrating his divine power to raise the dead in the story about his friend, Lazarus --

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE.

There were scoffers at Bethany. Even though they see a dead man come out of his tomb they cannot accept it. They can’t wait to tell their version of the story to the religious authorities back in Jerusalem – Jesus has power, but his authority over death is dangerous to their way of life. They are blind to the reality of the resurrection. To this day there are still people who dismiss the idea of life after death. Like the Sadducees they insist there is no such thing as a resurrection; which if you will excuse the play on words, is why they are *sad-you-see*.

Scoffers do not help anyone. They may have the best or worst of intentions, but their objective is generally the same – self-improvement. The truth is, they are helpless. They are no better than the dead. And who is more helpless than someone who has died? But there is more to the story! Jesus comes to rescue all people, including the scoffers, from sin and death. He is the only Savior who has come to truly help us. The Bible reveals him – and only him -- as the Lord of life after death.

- In *Holy Baptism* the old sinful self was drowned, reviving the new life of Christ that is planted in us like a seed that grows by grace through faith. As believers we are as good as dead to sin, but completely alive because of Jesus Christ and his imputed righteousness. We look forward with hope that is as real as the power of God the Holy Spirit at work in us. As John testifies in his Gospel, we have already passed from death to life! (5:25)
- In *Holy Communion* the seed of faith planted in us is nourished and strengthened for a life of service in the kingdom of God. In, with, and under what we can see as bread and wine, we receive by faith the very body and blood of Christ given and shed for us and for our redemption on the cross. We come into the real presence of our Lord who gives us a foretaste of the feast to come in heaven with all true believers. He gives us himself for he is the resurrection and the life! (11:25)
- In the *Holy Scripture* there is this nugget of truth – Lazarus will see it two times; while we continue to worry about the first time. Either way, there is comfort and peace for all who believe what the Bible clearly teaches in the story about --

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE.

The dead are raised.

In Jesus' Name,
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