My Shepherd Will Supply My Need 6) Life

John 11:17-27, 38-45 ● March 22, 2026 ● Lent Series

Medical emergencies call for a quick response. Two years ago, on a cold February day a woman flew into Anchorage. She was not dressed for the weather and somehow ended up outside with no phone and knocking on someone's door. Seeing a disoriented person outside their door, the house called 911. But the incident wasn't labeled a medical emergency. Instead, the incident was labeled by dispatch as a disturbance. When police finally arrived over an hour later the woman was lying on the cold icy ground and already dying of hypothermia. Sadly, she succumbed to the cold, and a lawsuit was filed last month. You can't just put off emergency medical response. A delay can be deadly. A messenger came to Jesus one day with some news that would be alarming to any of us. A close friend, one who Jesus loved, was very ill. But how Jesus responds on that particular day changes our response to all bad news. Jesus delayed. And yet he met every need!

It is obvious why Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus about their sick brother. They knew Jesus was the great physician who could heal all diseases and cure all ills. They clearly wanted Jesus to hurry and bring healing. But after getting the news Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. Why? Was it because he didn't know how serious this illness was? No. He told his disciples what he already knew: "*Lazarus is dead. And for your sake I'm glad I was not there. Let us go to him.*" The disciples couldn't mistake his plan in going, "*I'm going there to wake him."*

When Jesus finally arrived near the village of Bethany someone told him that Lazarus had already been dead for four days. There were many Jews there comforting the two sisters, Mary and Martha, at the death of their brother. Funerals in ancient Israel took place the same day as the death or as soon as possible. The grieving and visiting by friends lasted for many days. Martha heard Jesus was near and snuck away from the crowd to meet with him. She knew where to go in times of grief.

Martha found Jesus and let out a sigh, "*Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."* She was not blaming Jesus. Nor was it an expression of unbelief. She clearly still knew and believed Jesus was able to do anything. She only lamented that he wasn't there to stop the recent death. And still she expressed the confidence that he can do anything, "*But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask."*

Consider what we mull over when bad news turns to the worst. We turn to God with an "if only" on our mind. Every Christian knows that Jesus is able to help and heal. God is in control of all things, even illness. But even with the eyes of faith don't we sometimes wonder at God's ways? All the "ifs" can leave us wondering, "why?" Many Christians who have experienced the pain of cancer have wondered at God's timing. "If God had just given me a few more warning signs, I might have been able to get my spouse to the doctor sooner, they might have been able to save her." What believer isn't wallowing in the "ifs" of God's timing? "If you had just sent your angels to watch a little closer, the accident wouldn't have happened." I'm sure everyone around Martha was wondering the same! You can imagine Martha and Mary talking with each other right before their brother died. "If only Jesus were here now." And even the grieving crowd wondered, "*He healed the blind. Couldn't he have been here to heal this man too!"* "If only, Lord."

Martha had more than an "if only" faith. She expressed confidence that Jesus could still do anything to turn around the deep hurt. Maybe at times we join with Martha in the sighs of, "If only you had intervened, Lord." But then we don't add to that sigh the same assertion of faith, "But even yet, Lord, you're still able to work anything." What kind of faith is that? We believe the Lord is able to save but we set some line after which we say, "Opps. He's too late." We fail to add what Martha rightly adds, "But even now, Lord, you can do *anything."*

Jesus affirms what "anything" includes. "*Your brother will live again."* He points to a future hope. It is easy to dwell on an apparent or perceived failure of God's timing. But Jesus points us forward. We need to look where God's timing leads. For all who trust in him his timing leads to a resurrection. When someone falls asleep in Christ it doesn't matter how tragic or untimely that death might be. It doesn't matter how bad the timing seems to us. Nor does it matter if it seems to us like God somehow cut short his rescue plan. We can declare this same truth. Don't look at what we think is an abysmal failure of God in the past. Look to what God says is an amazing feat in the future: the resurrection.

Martha gets it. "*I know he will rise again at the resurrection at the last day*." There will be a great resurrection of all the dead. She knew that. Her theology was sound. She evidently had listened to Jesus well.

How can anyone be sure they will join in that resurrection to life? Jesus makes one of the most comforting assertions in all of Scripture. "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die*." Consider the implications of that statement! It turns around all our fears and doubts. Jesus takes claim over death and declares himself to be the source of life for all who believe in him. There is no level of achievement attached. It centers on Jesus and who he is and what he does for us. It is for all who believe.

And he adds one of the most meaningful questions in all the pages of Scripture. Jesus asks her, "*Do you believe this?"* He knew she did. He wanted her to realize the comfort that truth brings. Do you believe Jesus is the resurrection and life?

Do you believe that all who trust in him will live, and live forever, not just in spirit, but in body? Do you believe that he holds in his hand the power over death and the grave? He says, "*The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies."* Do you believe he is talking also about you? Faith in Jesus means more than just faith that he can do something. It means he can and will do it also for you. And it means that death no longer has hold over you. Do you believe this?

Martha, the one we find in Luke's gospel as too busy at first to listen to Jesus, now makes one of the clearest confessions of faith –even in the face of grief, "*I do believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world."*

Jesus had her quietly send for her sister. Martha went and pulled Mary aside to tell her that Jesus wanted to speak to her. Mary ran off quickly to meet him. A crowd followed, thinking she was going to grieve at the tomb. She fell at Jesus' feet. The same words of confusion, lament and regret fall from her lips. "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*." Jesus saw her weeping, and all the friends too. He was deeply moved and troubled. Why had he waited to come? Why wasn't he there in time? Why did this death happen?

We skipped past it in our reading today, and don't have time to dwell on it, but consider how one of the most comforting things in this whole account isn't anything Jesus said or even the miracle he performed. "Jesus wept." God does not delight in suffering. He grieves over it. Jesus did not delay because he was cold-hearted. That is always true.

But he wanted them to see more than just how much he cared. "*Where have you laid him*?" As they went, they could see tears coming from his face. They showed him the tomb. Jesus prepared them for what was about to happen by saying, "*Open the tomb*." Can you imagine the sudden silence and awkward wondering at what Jesus intended? Martha is almost embarrassed by it. Dead and rotten flesh goes quickly foul; the body begins to decay. It had been four days. In faith Martha had spoken rightly. But did she grasp what she meant earlier by "anything?" "*Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"* This was the Resurrection and the Life saying, "Trust me."

Jesus then prayed out loud so that those who heard might believe that the Father sent him into the world as Savior. And then he raised his voice. Not necessarily so that he could be heard by the dead or be more effective in his command. Just spoke loudly so that that none could confuse what they saw next. With three words he performed the greatest miracle yet. The daughter of Jairus was young and had recently died before Jesus raised her. The widow's son at Nain was still being carried out for his burial. But this man was now already four days dead. Many witnesses knew of his death. His body was already in the process of decay. *"Lazarus, come out."*

The dead man came out. Notice the title "the dead man." He was vacating his tomb, walking, alive. The burial cloths still covered his body. It seems like the crowd was too stunned and afraid to take it in. Jesus next words put to rest the silence and moved them into action, "*Take off the grave clothes and let him go*."

God's delay was for the strengthening of the faith of all present, and to bring many friends of Mary and Martha to believe. Soon many of these same eyewitnesses would be tempted to sigh, "If only… Judas hadn't betrayed him…if only he had resisted the soldiers and stopped them… if only he had spoken up to defend himself… if only the crowd had called for his release… if only he had used his power to come down from the cross… he would not have died." But they knew; and they believed. "*You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was promised to come into the world*." The Father did not intervene. Jesus died. But he was carrying out his plan and purpose all along. That plan and purpose was to forever do away with death. He came into the world to die for all sin so that sinners would no longer face death's curse.

Jesus saw the urgent and desperate situation of this world. He didn't rush in with a heavenly dispatch labelling our predicament as a disturbance. He could have and rightly we deserved to die in the cold, shut out forever from his kingdom and treated as a disturbance. But from eternity he labeled our condition a medical and spiritual emergency. He didn't rush in like a first-responder or jump into action like an ambulance driver. Instead, he let the world go on and let his plan and timing unfold until he came at just the right time. And after centuries of so many clamoring, "If only God had intervened," he did. He is the Son of God who was promised to come into the world to meet our greatest need.

And he will once more meet our greatest need when he raises all the dead. His rescue plan did not end in death. He rose to life on the third day. And we will see the glory of God with Lazarus and all who believe.

We call on Jesus and we will at times sigh, "If only, Lord, if only you had prevented this pain." But then our Savior reminds us in his Word "This will not end in death." He makes clear his plan and his timing are always right –even if it involves facing death. There never need be another, "if only" because he said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Believe in him and you will live even though you die. You can be certain of this. You will live forever. On the last day he will raise all the dead. And all who believe in him will live and see the glory of God.

Instead of lamenting, "If only" we can declare to all who lost a loved one in Christ, "He will rise again." And that person can echo back with Martha, "*I know he will rise again at the resurrection*." Jesus' timing is always right to supply all our needs.