

Signs - Sermon 7 - "Raising Lazarus from the Dead"

August 9, 2015

When we see someone in need, we respond. Recently I have seen some pretty cool responses to people in need. Young Avery Huffman, 6 years old was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor earlier this year. Her parents, Brandon and Amanda, have been chronicling her fight via a web based journal. Earlier this week, Brandon posted an entry about a particularly tough day of radiation treatment -- one that took a 180 degree turn after a phone call from one of Avery's favorite people

A couple of weeks ago, I read about Matthew Walzer, a 19 year old man who has cerebral palsy, was frustrated that he could do everything in life independently except tie his shoes. If he wanted stylish shoes, someone would have to tie them for him. Shoes that he could get on himself were not fashionable or functional. 3 years ago, he sent a letter to Nike expressing his footwear frustrations and challenged them to create a shoe for him and others that could be worn without any assistance. Several weeks ago, the Nike LeBron Zoom Soldier VIII FlyEase was released.

Elena Delle Donne, a WNBA All-Star, connected with Matthew Walzer. She wanted to meet the man who created the FlyEase shoes. Delle Donne turned down a scholarship at the powerhouse, UConn Huskies, to play for the University of Delaware. She wanted to be near her sister Lizzie, who has Cerebral Palsy and is blind and deaf. This was her first year as an All-Star and in honor of Matthew and her sister, she wore the Nike FlyEase.

Today, we are finishing up the series called "Signs". We have looked at the miracles that are recorded in the book of John. John refers to these miracles as "signs". They are not just pointing us to something, they are pointing us to someone-Jesus. Mark Batterson says, "Don't seek miracles. Follow Jesus. And if you follow Jesus long enough and far enough, you'll eventually find yourself in the middle of some miracles." That is where we find ourselves today, with the final "sign". It is right in the middle of John's gospel in chapter 11. This final "sign" is the climax or crescendo to all the other "signs" that John has pointed us to thus far.

In John 11, we read about a man named Lazarus. Now let me stop you right there. You know this story and it would be very easy to put it on autopilot thinking, "I know this story. It is just like watching Titanic. The ship sinks. Lazarus dies and Jesus raises him from the dead." Remember, John the disciple, is giving us "signs" to teach us about his Lord and Savior and his best friend ... maybe he has something to teach you about Jesus today.

In verse 5, it says, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Earlier, I said we tend to reach out when people are in need. We especially reach out if it is a friend or family member. We have seen Jesus respond this way in the book of John. He was willing to be interrupted when people had needs. He was willing to do things that He had not planned on doing, but look at verse 6. "Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for 2 more days." That is strange. That is not what we said most people do when a friend is in need. I have often wondered what would have been going on in the news and social media if this happened today. Headlines "Jesus doesn't care!!"; Twitter #LazarusNeedsYOU. I wonder what Mary and Martha would have been posting on Facebook. I wonder if a post would have read..."it is in tough times that you really find out who your friends are," or "why do total strangers seem to be more important than your best friends?"

Jesus not only reacts strangely, but He also says some strange things. In verse 4, he says, "This sickness will not end in death." In verse 11, Jesus says, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." The disciples had to be very confused by his response to the sister's request and to the statements he was making. But in verse 14, it says, "So then he told them plainly, `Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'" Do you see that phrase, "for your sake." What if this "sign" has very little to do with Lazarus? Lots of people died back then just like they do now. What if this "sign" is supposed to teach the disciples and you and I something more about Jesus?

I thought about this final "sign". What if Jesus could pull them all together? I wish he would have told his disciples, "You guys go ahead, I'm going to pray for Lazarus. I'll meet you there." If I am Jesus, as soon as they are gone, I'm not just going to walk on water, I'm going to fly. I'm going to fly over the disciples and they are going to say, "Look, it is a bird, it is a plane, no it is SuperJesus." When I get to Lazarus, while he is still sick, I am going to let

people know that I could have healed him right when I heard about his illness, but because this family means so much, I just had to be here. I would come up with some great question to ask Lazarus or some great statement to say when he was healed. After I healed him, I would break out wine and food everyone.

Thank goodness he did something different. Jesus' strange reaction to Lazarus reflect a motive that is tough for me to understand. James Dobson, author of *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, states, "With no disrespect intended, let me say that what happens in the story of Lazarus is characteristic of the Christian life. Haven't you noticed that Jesus usually shows up about four days late?"

Philip Yancey, author of *The Jesus I Never Knew* writes, "I envisioned Jesus as the Great Magician. But I was confused. Sometimes parking places did not open up and fountain pens stayed lost. Sometimes church people lost their jobs. Sometimes they died. My own father died of polio just after my first birthday despite around-the-clock prayer vigil involving hundreds of dedicated Christians. Where was God then?"

I am certain you have had the same thoughts and you have asked the same questions. I want to challenge you to trust that God's timing is perfect even when he seems catastrophically late. God's economy of time and energy are very different from mine. All throughout the Bible, there are things I don't understand and to be honest, I would have done them different. Take David in the Old Testament. A prophet anoints the shepherd boy David as King. David doesn't immediately take the throne. In fact, the next 14 years are spent running for his life as King Saul tries to kill him. Why didn't God do something?

Consider Jesus' ministry. Jesus starts his ministry at age 30. Why wait till 30? Why not when he turns 21 or 25? Think what he could have done with 5, 10 or 15 years? Can I challenge you today to risk trusting that it is unnecessary for you and me to be told why Jesus' timing is different from yours and mine. Remember, he said, "it is for your sake." We can trust him and his timing because we are on his mind. Listen to the statement by Oswald Chambers, "Sometimes it looks like God is missing the mark because we're too short-sighted to see what He's aiming for." This story has a staged quality to it. Not staged by the author John, but Jesus is intentionally doing something different and we are supposed to pick up on it by his strange reaction to Lazarus' death.

Let's see what Jesus was aiming for. Let's move to 4 days later when he shows up in Bethany where Lazarus has died. Lazarus has been dead for 4 days. We are told that "many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother."

When Jesus is close to the town, the two sisters go out to meet Jesus, but they do this individually. Martha goes out first. Look what she says in verse 21, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." There is more to the conversation that happens between Jesus and Martha and we are going to look at it, but look down a little further in this story. Verse 32 says "When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'" These two sisters have the exact same reaction to Jesus, but when we look at how Jesus responds to Martha and Mary, it is very different. The conversations and the interactions are going to show us fully who Jesus is and fully what he can do.

Let's look back at the conversation with Martha. Remember, she said, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She goes on to say, "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Now that is pretty cool. In the midst of her grief, in the midst of being pretty disappointed, she says, I know you have a close relationship with your Father. Then, the conversation turns like a lot of conversations at a funeral home. Jesus says, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day." They seem to be talking about heaven and eternity. Don't we do that? We say, "They are in a better place." All that is true and that brings comfort, but something more is happening here. He looks Martha square in the eye and I love how the Message says verse 25, "You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, the Resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And anyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all."

Do you get what Jesus is saying? He is saying I am fully God. Jesus doesn't just have access to divine supernatural power. He is resurrection. He is the power. Most of the founders of all major religions say, "I am a prophet who shows you how to find God." Jesus says, "I'm God, who has come to find you."

Are you ok with Jesus being fully God? Thomas Jefferson wasn't. Jefferson took a razor blade and cut out his favorite passages from the bible. Jefferson

included the teachings of Jesus, but excluded the miracles. He deleted the virgin birth, the resurrection and every supernatural event in between. His version of the Gospels ends with the stone rolled in front of the tomb. Jesus died on the cross but never rose from the dead.

Here is where we are in this series. He is more than a wine maker. He is more than a water walker. In verse 37, some of the people at the funeral visitation said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" The answer is yes, he could have. The real question that we have been brought to in the book of John is "Can this man take a dead man and bring him back to life." This would be Jesus' greatest claim-God. This claim "I am the resurrection and the life-right now-put him in a category all by himself, the Son of God. After that interchange between Martha and Jesus, Jesus asks her, "Do you believe this?" It is not just a good question, it is a challenging question. What about you? Fully God ... the resurrection, right now ... the life, right now. Do you believe this? This "sign" in John's Gospel has brought us to a fork in the road. Are you going to be someone, like Thomas Jefferson, who stands there on Good Friday in front of a tomb with a stone in the front with a dead body inside. If that is where you are, Jesus is just a good guy, a compassionate man, a wise sage, a great teacher and a powerful prophet. John, who writes this book, wants you to stand in front of an empty tomb, just like he did 2000 years ago and know that he is the resurrection and the life right now.

Let's talk about his conversation with Mary. There really isn't a conversation. She has fallen at his feet and she is crying and some others who had come with her were crying. Your version probably says something like, "Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled." If you look at the Greek, there is a deeper description of what was going on with Jesus. Tim Keller says the Greek word means "to bellow with anger." The New Living Translation says, "a deep anger welled up within him." Have you ever been so angry at something that it made you cry? Jesus has this internal anger, so much that it brings him to tears. I believe that he hurt for Mary and the others. I believe that he was sad that Lazarus had died. But there is something more going on here.

Jesus goes over in front of the tomb and John gives us a second description, best stated in the Message, "Then Jesus, the anger welling up within him,

arrived at the tomb." Why this anger? It is probably a very different description than you have ever had of Jesus standing in front of the tomb of Lazarus.

He is mad at sin, which results in evil and death. This is not God's design. Remember, he is fully God. He did not create a world with sin, suffering and death. Do you remember last week when Jordan preached? We dealt with the question of "why do bad things happen?" You can take it further and ask, "if Jesus didn't create this way, why doesn't he just stop it? Why doesn't he end all the evil?" One of Jesus' problems is so much of the evil is found in the human heart-selfishness, cruelty, anger, oppression, war and violence. So, if he wipes out evil, he wipes out you and me. We have already been banished from the Garden of Eden. We have already been destroyed in a flood. Jesus knows it has to be different this time.

If this was just about bringing Lazarus back to life, there is no reason to get involved emotionally. Why cry when in just a few moments you are going to bring Lazarus back to life? I propose to you today that if this was just about bringing Lazarus back, Jesus would have been smiling, excited and even playful. I think he would have been rubbing his hands with anticipation, saying under his breath "Wait until you all see what I'm about to do."

I had something like this happen to me this past Valentine's. Rebecca has a ring with 3 Tanzanite stones for our 3 girls. Our youngest, Savannah, was wearing it last year and got sick. Her body starting swelling and she had to go to the doctor and they had to cut the ring off. This Valentine's I decide to get the ring fixed and while I was out, I decided to look for a matching bracelet. I found a beautiful one. This is about a week before Valentine's Day and I am pretty excited and proud of myself, so I give Rebecca the ring and she is happy. I then, give her a wrapped box with the bracelet in it. She opens it and says, "Oh that looks just like the bracelet you got me a couple years ago." I didn't remember and still don't, but those bracelets are almost identical. It is good to know that I still have good taste.

There is one other thing that is causing so much deep emotion. Jesus knows he is going to have to die. His anger is not a begrudging anger as in "I can't believe I have to do this." He knows he is going to have to be fully human and experience death. A line is being drawn in the sand with the opponent death, which has never been defeated. Here is what this means. Bringing Lazarus out of the grave would put Jesus in a grave. It would cost him his life to save ours.

Standing in front of the tomb, Jesus says, "Take away the stone." Martha doesn't want him to because she thought the odor from a dead body would be too bad. Jesus prays. Look at his prayer in John 11:41, 42, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." Do you see the phrase right in the heart of the prayer..."for the benefit of the people." Let me remind you what Jesus said to his disciples at the beginning of this story, "...for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.."

Jesus not only had to deal with his death, but this story also, foreshadows Jesus' resurrection, but it does so much more. It foreshadows your resurrection. This is not just something Jesus did for Lazarus. It is a picture of what Jesus wants to do today. He wants to be your resurrection and your life right now! He is exactly what you need. 100% God, 100% human.

We have seen a strange reaction from Jesus about a friend. We saw the reaction of 2 sisters. But, the most important reaction is yours. What is your reaction to these "signs" that have led us to Jesus, who is fully God and fully human.

Maybe, today, you are like Lazarus. Sin has taken its toll on your life. You see, in the tomb, it is dark, it is scary, there doesn't seem to be much hope. That is what sin does, it binds us up in grave clothes. They say Lazarus would have had about 100 pounds of grave clothes on. Today, the same voice that called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" We believe that same voice maybe saying your name. Maybe, you need to hear, "John, come out!" or "Stephanie, come out!"

There is another tomb where a stone was rolled away. When Jesus, being fully God and fully human, walked out of that tomb, impossible stopped being a problem. We believe he has the power to resurrect things that are dead such as dreams, lives and relationships and bring them back to life.