



## Going Deeper - Weekly Sermon Discussion Guide

### The Great Interruption - 4/4/2021

*"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." John 11:21-22*

Lazarus was sick and very close to death. Martha knew Jesus could heal him, Martha knew that Jesus loved him, and Martha knew that all she had to do was ask Jesus to come and he would. And she did. And he did not. Many of us have experienced emotions that would be similar to what Martha was going through. We hope, we believe, we are just sure . . . God answers prayer, He instructed us to ask, we ask, we know he hears and answers prayer. But as Lazarus got sicker, Martha's hope must have been teetering on a balance beam, shaky and hanging on, so hopeful and yet so scared. Then Jesus did not come; then Lazarus died; and then Martha's hope and faith must have felt dead as well. The emotions turned to intense sadness and grief and disappointment.

But Jesus came and Martha experienced a glimmer of hope. She knew Jesus, she was sure that she knew him. We see her vacillating hope and fear and longing to hope again as she interacts with Jesus. "If only . . . but even now . . . but don't open the tomb because he stinks." Then Jesus did what Martha had believed he would do, could do; but he did it in a much grander fashion. He didn't just heal Lazarus, he made him whole. He didn't just revive him, he resurrected him. I think if Jesus had arrived and healed Lazarus before he died, Martha would have been happy and Jesus' actions would have been predictable to her. But how much more joy and elation do you think Martha experienced when Jesus acted unpredictably and brought Lazarus back to life after he died?

None of the gospels record Martha's experience after Jesus died and was buried in the tomb but I wish I knew how the death and resurrection of Lazarus prepared her for the death of Jesus and the hope of his resurrection. Jesus had said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life." It is as if he is saying, "Martha here is a little gift for you, hang on to it because you are going to need it very soon." Jesus' arrest and trial would have created those same types of emotions of fear mixed with hope and belief - teetering on a balance beam, shaky and hanging on, so hopeful and yet so scared. Jesus isn't going to die, Jesus won't be killed, but then he did and he was. I wonder if Martha felt like she was holding her breath. Holding in her hand the little gift Jesus gave her, a promise, an insight, a reason to believe - if Lazarus was placed in a tomb and then came out into new life, wasn't Jesus preparing her for his own resurrection and new life?

There is a state of an uncertain or undecided condition, a feeling that life is suspended - called by some to be limboland. Life is uncomfortable, inconvenienced and interrupted and feels almost unbearable. And yet -- but God - even now --- we have been given an invitation to believe! We have been given a gift, a promise. Even in our despair, he keeps a tiny spark of belief alive within us and will turn trials and tragedies into triumph, and "...it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (John 11:4).

### So Consider...

1. Have you asked God for something and found yourself stuck in the limboland of waiting for the answer? Do you think God wants to do something between the request and the answer? What is he doing in your life right now?
2. What gift or promise has God given you through answered prayer in the past and how does that sustain you and give you hope in times of fear and uncertainty?
3. Typically, we don't like to be preached at or have people try to "fix" us, so how would you support and encourage someone who feels God has not heard or answered their prayers?

**Take Action:** This week take time to review and remember the way God has answered your prayers in the past, and take those responses in the form of praise and thanksgiving into your requests and petitions so you may reside in his peace and his rest today and tomorrow.

*"And the One seated on the the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'" Revelation 21:5*

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. ~Tess