



Waiting

- John 11:1-62

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We often see waiting as a difficult thing, a negative time, where our moments, or our days, are being wasted.

What if they aren't?

In John chapter 11, one of Jesus' friends became very ill. His name was Lazarus and his sisters were very worried about him, so they sent word to Jesus, asking him to come, "Lord, the one you love is ill," they said [John 11:3].

And Jesus' response is very strange. He tells his disciples that this illness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory, that God's Son might be glorified. And then we read a striking sentence, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days..." [John 11: 5,6]

As the reader, we expect it to say, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he hurried there as fast as he could!"

But Jesus didn't hurry. He waited. He stayed where he was for two more days, and then he left for Judea. And even then, his disciples questioned it. They thought it could be dangerous. It was the wrong time. Apparently, the last time they were in Judea, the Jews tried to stone Jesus. He needed to be careful!

This part of scripture makes me wonder about time, and delays, and waiting, and safety, and danger and all the ways we normally try to define those things.

In reply to his disciples though, Jesus spoke about daylight, again, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight?" [John 11:9] It is daylight, now! We will go...

Jesus understood about timing, and safety and danger... but his disciples did not, so he spoke even more clearly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." [John 11:15].

It's the same focus as the rest of the Gospel of John. The important thing for Jesus was that his people believed! And in this case, Jesus said there would be new grounds for believing! It's for 'your sake' I was not there, he said, so that you may believe. It was for the sake of the disciples that Jesus waited!

Maybe, it was also for the sake of the reader, 2,000 years later.

And then Jesus and his disciples arrived in Bethany. By then, Lazarus had been dead, and in the tomb for four days. Martha, who was grieving, immediately rushed out to meet Jesus on the road, and she revealed to him, more than anything, that she believed in him. She said to Jesus that even now, she was sure he could perform a miracle. She knew who he was, and what he could do [John 11:27].

But then amazingly, in the middle of all that believing, and grieving, and pain, and waiting, Jesus spoke to Martha about the deepest, most unimaginable truth. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." [John 11:25,26]

It strikes me that Jesus spoke this most profound truth, in the middle of the deepest pain, and waiting and grief. He didn't speak it when everything was going well, or smoothly. He spoke it to Martha, in her terrible pain, and she heard it, and she believed it, while grieving.

And then Mary arrived, falling at Jesus' feet, weeping. And when Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the grief of the mourners, he went to the tomb himself. When he did, he also wept. It's the second thing that happened in the middle of all that grieving, and pain and waiting. Jesus wept. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

That speaks to me too. In our worst times of waiting and pain, when everything seems impossible and awful, we hold on to the deepest truths, and we know and trust that Jesus weeps with us.

And then... Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus walked to the tomb and he asked for the stone to be removed. He didn't care about the four-day-old odour inside. He prayed, and then he called Lazarus to come out. And the dead man walked out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face [John 11:44].

Lazarus was alive! Many people believed! It was another sign, pointing to who Jesus was, and also pointing ahead to something even greater, that would happen within a few short weeks.

But at the time, Jesus calmly told the people to take the grave clothes off Lazarus and let him go. And they did. Interestingly, there is no recorded response from Lazarus at the time. Did he say thank you? Did it change the way he lived from then on? We assume so. The next time we meet Lazarus, he was reclining at the table with Jesus, sharing a meal, eating with them, alive. And as a result of the miracle, more and more people believed, 'and continued to spread the word' [John 12:17].

The passage reminds all of us to continue to lift our gaze to Jesus, in the middle of our pain and waiting and grief and fear and impossible things – wherever we are in the world, whether it's within natural disasters, or the recovery and resilience work post-earthquake in Nepal, or within our own personal grief and questions. We know that we don't understand time or safety or waiting, but we trust the One who does. And we're so very thankful that he weeps with us... and that the story isn't over, yet.

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