

Kurigasawa Baptist Church, November 23, 2025
Sunday Worship Service Sermon

Sermon Title: "The Resurrection of Lazarus" John 11:28-37

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This morning's reading from John 11 vividly describes the death and resurrection of Lazarus, the sick man, interwoven with the dialogues and exchanges between his sisters Martha and Mary, the surrounding Jews, and Jesus. Lazarus himself does not speak at all throughout the story. Yet, we cannot find a character with such a powerful presence in any of the other Gospels. Moreover, in the Gospel of John, this very event of Lazarus' resurrection becomes the trigger that sets Jesus on the path to the cross, the path of suffering. In this sense, today's story of Lazarus' resurrection is a turning point in the Gospel of John. Let us revisit this story from the beginning of chapter 11.

"There was a sick man. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha, and his name was Lazarus."

Bethany was a village east of Jerusalem, beyond the Mount of Olives, at its eastern foot. Records indicate Bethany was about two kilometers from the summit of the Mount of Olives. Jesus was often welcomed into Martha's home. This family supported Jesus' ministry by providing accommodation for him and his followers. They were, in a sense, his strong supporters. However, news reached Jesus, who was staying on the other side of the Jordan River, that his brother Lazarus had fallen gravely ill. "Lord," Martha spoke to him, "the one you love is sick." It must have been serious.

But when Jesus heard this, he said, "This sickness will not end in death." The original Greek text reads, "This sickness is not heading toward death." In other words, the final destination of this illness is not death. These words were not spoken only to Lazarus. They apply to all who believe in Jesus. Christians do not live heading toward death. Death is not the goal of life. It is life, not death. We are heading toward the life of God who raised Jesus from the dead. Thinking this, Jesus remained in the same place for two more days after hearing the news that Lazarus was critically ill. A beloved one is gravely ill. They long for him to come quickly, to heal them. Yet he acted as if he was intentionally delaying his departure. Seeing this, we think, "Why didn't he go sooner? Isn't he too heartless?" Reading verse 39 afterward, we learn that Jesus arrived at Lazarus's house four days after his death. Jesus did not act immediately. Yet through this, we must understand: God sometimes refuses to be our God in the way we expect—the God we call upon only in times of difficulty, the One who responds to our needs when we ask. God is not our servant. He is our Lord. The Book of Ecclesiastes contains these famous words: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to weep and a time to laugh..." The time when the Lord rose up for Lazarus was not the moment when Martha and Mary begged Him to come. It was a time so late that, by common sense, it seemed impossible—impossible for anyone to raise the dead. Yes. God allows us to experience the depths of sorrow and despair at least once. But it is to strengthen our faith through that experience and to make us aware of the depth of His love for us. Some say: "God does not show His love by sparing us from trials, but by giving us the strength to overcome and endure them even when we face them." That is exactly right. Amen.

The Jews were trying to arrest and kill Jesus, as verse 8 states. But why was the act that followed—the Lord Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead—considered such a significant and decisive act of blasphemy against God? Let us consider this. Originally, the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, sought to faithfully fulfill the works and deeds of the Law because their ultimate goal was to enter the kingdom of God—that is, to inherit eternal life. Obtaining this eternal life was closely connected to resurrection from the dead, yet the Jews did not have a clear answer about what would happen to them after death. For example, a group called the Sadducees believed there was no resurrection. On the other hand, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but they thought it would happen on a distant future day, the day of the end. Martha, who welcomed Jesus, could only respond according to

the Pharisees' teaching when Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again." She replied, "Lord, we know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day," answering exactly as she had been taught. Yet, Jesus brought about an event that shattered such Jewish common sense. The eternal life they so eagerly sought was granted by Jesus, who further declared Himself to be the resurrection and the life. To the Jews, this was an outrageous blasphemy, an audacious claim. According to Jesus, belief in Him alone could instantly grant entry into the Kingdom of God—an entrance that remained uncertain even after a lifetime of faithful observance of the Law. This was an outrageous statement that denied the authority of the Law.

After saying this, Jesus next encounters Mary. Many Jews followed her as well. They thought Jesus was going to the tomb to weep with Mary there. Meeting the Lord Jesus, Mary fell at his feet and wept, saying, "Lord, if you had been here (sooner), my brother would not have died." She complained bitterly. The Bible records that Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the many Jews weeping with her, and his heart was deeply moved. What was the Lord angry about here? What was the object of Jesus' anger? Normally, one does not become angry seeing people mourning and weeping before a grave after losing a loved one. Yet at this moment, Jesus was intensely moved. He was deeply moved. Why? Because both Mary and the other Jews present were utterly crushed before death, completely powerless against its absolute force. They had bowed before death's overwhelming power, making death the perfect victor. I believe His anger was directed at their state of being. If so, then the tears mentioned in verse 35, "Jesus wept," were not tears of sympathy or pity ("poor thing") for Martha and Mary who had lost their brother. Rather, they were tears of anger toward death itself, which drives humans to such despair, and tears of anger at their mistaken approach to death. It's hard to believe the Jews truly grasped Jesus' feelings here. They say, "See how much he loved him!" Interesting. The Greek word for "loved" here isn't *agape* but *phileo*—a love for beautiful, pure, or agreeable things. Moreover, it's unmistakably written in the past tense. It means he once loved him. However, love spoken of in the past tense is no longer love. Consider how impertinent it is to say of a living person, "He was a good guy. That guy..." Hearing these words, Jesus, once again filled with bitterness, entered the tomb. For Jesus, Lazarus was not a person of the past. This act was a firm No to the notion that death is an absolute power, that there is nothing but destruction.

But what astonishes me is the action Jesus took next. It begins with the words, "Take away the stone." This "stone" separates the world of the dead from the earthly world of the living. It makes me think how many such hard stones are piled up within our hearts. Such hard stones lie between Israel and Palestine, between Russia and Ukraine, and between our country and China. Jesus seeks to remove such stones and enter Lazarus' tomb, a place everyone hates. Hearing this, Martha said without thinking, "Lord, by this time there is a smell, for he has been dead four days." But Jesus cut her off and went on into the dark tomb—that place where the smell of death and the power of death and sin reign. The holy God went into this world where sinners dwell, where the smell of death now hangs, and stood as the Giver of life. Here, I recall that Christmas message from John 1: "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." God's Son offered His own life on the cross to redeem our sins and give us life. The image of Jesus standing in the tomb is precisely the image of the God of the cross.

Thus, Jesus calls out in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" Responding to this call, Lazarus comes to life. Faith begins with responding to God's call. The resurrection of the dead overlaps with the event of our sins being forgiven. That is, it overlaps with the fact that those who were once dead receive God's love and forgiveness, gain life, and are brought back to life. The resurrection of the dead represents not merely the physiological revival of the body, but the eternal life of those called into God's love and forgiven by Him, who continue to live a new life. We should not read Lazarus' resurrection as merely a special miracle story about a man particularly loved by the Lord Jesus. We too are being kept alive within this miracle. Moreover, this resurrection is happening right now, here—the call, "Kimura Kazumitsu, arise!" is happening within this worship service. That is the message of the Gospel of John. You who are weak now, take courage. You who are grieving now, be strengthened by the Lord's comfort. In God's eyes, we are precious and highly valued.

I pray for you.