**Dead As You Can Get**

Based on [John 11:1-6, 17-27, 38-53](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn11.28)

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Lenten Midweek 2

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The Lazarus from our lesson today, Jesus' friend, brother of Mary and Martha, died. Lazarus had been four days in the tomb before Jesus came to visit. This is important. In Jesus' day, there was a widespread belief that that the soul hovered around the body for up to two days after death. That meant that the soul could return to the body, and the dead could come back to life within that two day period. Four days means that Lazarus was as dead as you can get. Four Days means that, upon anyone’s reckoning, Lazarus was dead and gone.

But more to our point, Four days indicates something more. You see, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. This is important, because it means that Jesus might have been able to keep Lazarus from death had he not tarried. If we hear that someone we care for is near death, we call 911, the ambulance sounds the siren and runs red lights. In our experience, near death means emergency; and emergency means hurry.

But Jesus did not hurry. Jesus did tarry. He did delay. He waited until Lazarus was good and dead before he went to him. And when he had finally arrived and Lazarus had been Four Days in the tomb, the time was right to make an example out of Lazarus. Lazarus was an object lesson and Jesus had a point to make. And the point was this, nothing, not even death is a cause for anxiety in those who believe. This is obvious in the fact that Jesus takes belief in Him more serious than the death of Lazarus.

If you were confirmed in this church you were asked "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" And you answered, "*I do, by the grace of* God" And if you were received into membership as an adult, you vowed that your belief in Jesus Christ was more important than your life. And the only reason we can make such a bold claim is because death is only a temporary thing when Jesus is around. When Jesus comes around, life is eternal.

We all have to deal with death in our lives, expected and unexpected. The death and resurrection of Lazurus gives us a picture of how God is involved in our death. Jesus *allows* death to take Lazarus, he *allows* Lazarus to leave this life and he *allows* Lazarus' friends and relatives to go through the suffering and grief even though he had the power to prevent it all.

There is no other reading in the bible that is more fitting for Lent. Jesus *allows* Lazarus to die for a greater purpose, that is, to prepare witnesses for his resurrection; Jesus lets the friends and relatives of Lazarus go through much hurt and grief. Why? All in preparation and anticipation of the resurrection to come. I suspect that only if you can see the sense in Jesus letting Lazarus die can you see the sense in recognizing Lent, a penitential season of sorrow and grief over the death of Jesus. Yes Jesus let Lazarus die, even grieved himself over it. What's the use? What's the need? The use and the need is simply this: there is nothing more important than the tutoring of faith. And this happens through many tribulations through which we enter the kingdom of God.

How many of us see no need in learning basic math skills because that's too much work? When I was in school, I remember complaining having to slug through tedious math equations, showing my work. “We have calculators now,” I thought, “that have saved us from having to slave through learning math for ourselves.” “And things like algebra equations and geometric proofs, how will that help me get a job some day?”

It's a shame that we are beginning to see education and learning as important only so you can make good money some day. You don't learn math so you can get a job, or so you can make money. You learn math because analytical thought is part of what makes you human. If a calculator frees you from thinking, then it also robs you of humanity.

Now I really don't care whether you use a calculator or not. I use a calculator, and of course God doesn’t judge us according to our IQ. I’m more concerned with how this line of thinking spills over into our spiritual lives—this view that struggling through things ought to be avoided at all costs because there’s no benefit to it. And so if you see a calculator as a tool to free you from the tedium of math, then how do you see the cross of Jesus?

The cross of Jesus saves you, but it is not a tool to free you from attending to your salvation. Attending to your salvation is what makes you truly human. Working out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, that is what prepares you for the resurrection. That's what Lent is all about, it keeps you human, it keeps you honest reminding you that sin leads to death, and that struggling with repentance prepares and strengthens our faith.

And that's, no doubt what Martha, sister of Lazarus was doing. She was calculating salvation, walking through the geometric proofs of her faith. Listen to her marvelous sums:

Martha said to Jesus**, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (22) But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." (23)** Jesus said to her**, "Your brother will rise again." (24)** Martha said to him**, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." (25)** Jesus said to her**, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, (26) and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (27)** She said to him**, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."**

What marvellous faith Martha displayed in her grief! Would Martha have made the same confession had she not faced the death of her brother?...maybe so. Would she have continued steadfast in the faith had Jesus not resurrected him? Who know? But it's clear as a cloudless sky that Jesus makes her journey through Lent before he shows her Easter. He gives her the chance to work through her grief and confess her faith before he shows her his glory.

And so, what is the so important about the resurrection of Lazarus? It is the glory of Jesus. It is this: that the death and resurrection of Lazarus anticipates the death and resurrection of Christ, who is Lord over all even death. Lazarus was four days in the tomb, as dead as you can get. Jesus was three days in the tomb, dead beyond all reckoning.

Jesus was as dead as you can get before he raised himself up. He is the resurrection and the life, and whoever believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live. And the resurrection of Jesus anticipates our resurrection after him. And when you are troubled, when you grieve, when you doubt the mercy of God, hold on to his promise. With repentant joy, hold on to his cross and he will raise you up to life everlasting.