**WITH JESUS** (Week 9, March 7, 2018)

**Getting to Know Jesus Through the Gospel of John**

**John 11:17-44**

**Background for the Passage** The gospels provide us with many moments when the compassion and love of Jesus is clearly evident to all. But none demonstrated the empathetic compassion of a loving Lord better than Jesus’ interactions with Martha and Mary in John 11:17-37. Jesus tenderly handles the raw and intense emotions of both sisters, meets them in their grief instead of keeping His distance, and accepts them each as individuals who grieve differently instead of demanding an unrealistic uniformity.

2. Lazarus had already been in the grave for four days when Jesus and His disciples arrived in Bethany, near Jerusalem. Most likely, Lazarus had died the same day that his sisters had sent the messenger and the message about Lazarus serious illness to Jesus. (It would have taken one day to travel from Bethany to where Jesus and His disciples were located at the beginning of chapter 11. Then Jesus waited two days, and then it would have taken one day to make the journey.) The Jewish tradition was to bury the body on the same day as the death if at all possible. Then the bereaved family would stay at home and receive visitors who came to mourn, cry, honor, and comfort.

3. Many friends, neighbors, and acquaintances came to Bethany to mourn and comfort Mary and Martha. Lazarus had been a well-known and respected man, and people wanted to honor him by paying a condolence call on his sisters. Also, the location of Bethany, less than 2 miles from Jerusalem, made it convenient for many people to come. Even the influential religious leaders and others from the ruling class made the trip.

4. An ancient Jewish myth taught that the soul of a departed loved one sometimes would stay near the physical body after death for up to three days. At that point, the soul would depart for its’ eternal destination. It’s unclear if this myth was known by Jesus and His followers, but it is possible.

5. It was quite natural for Martha, the older sister, to privately leave her home and mourners and go to the edge of the village to meet Jesus first. Martha had an active nature, and probably often took the initiative in situations that she faced. (Lk. 10:38-42) She clearly wanted a private word with Jesus before the crowd at her house realized that He had arrived.

6. “Lord, If only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (11:21, 28) This strong statement spoken by both sisters reflected strong emotions of grief, faith, trust, pain, struggle, and perhaps some resentment or anger. Martha spoke the words while standing before Jesus, probably while looking at Him directly, while Mary choked out this phrase while emotionally crying her eyes out while laying on the ground at the feet of Jesus.

7. Martha’s statement of belief in 11:22 seems to indicate that she believes that Jesus could have still done a miracle, but clearly her logical side is battling with her faith. (11:22 & 11:39) She may have emotionally longed for a miracle, but her logical mind wouldn’t let her release the apparent realities. She believes that Jesus has the power to help, but she doesn’t fully believe that it’s going to happen.

8. When Jesus assured Martha that “Your brother will rise again,” (11:23) she misunderstood Him to be talking about the eventual future resurrection day when all of those who had died would be raised back to life. (11:24) Jesus was speaking about an actual event that would soon take place so that God would receive glory and so that Jesus would again be confirmed as the Son of God by a mighty miracle. But Martha, like some of us, was distracted by a far off future theological concept. Jesus had to make it personal and even more powerful to help Martha to understand.

9. Jesus declared with boldness and power that the resurrection is not just a far off distant theological reality, but also the present and real person of Jesus Christ. He proclaimed that anyone who believed in Him would never remain dead but would have life. He would be the trailblazer through death into life, and not only life in this world, but an eternal life in the next. (11:25-26)

10. Jesus called Martha to take a stand and to proclaim her belief. She boldly and directly did so, without hesitation or apology. (11:27) This statement of belief was not necessary for Jesus, and was not a public affirmation so that the disciples would know, but rather a powerful statement that would strengthen Martha’s faith in the midst of pain and grief. Her statement of belief was for her benefit, so that she would remember that she had a strong foundation of faith.

11. After her amazing, faith-affirming encounter with Jesus Christ, Martha wanted her sister to experience this same strengthening and encouraging time with their Lord. She tried to get her sister Mary out of the house, without alerting all of the mourners. Mary quickly got up to go and meet Jesus, but the crowd noticed, and assuming that she was going to grieve at the tomb of her brother, followed her through the village.

12. After Mary threw herself at the feet of Jesus, overwhelmed by pain and grief, she cried out the same phrase that Martha had spoken earlier. Mary though, being very different than her sister, cannot continue a conversation with Jesus. She is overwhelmed by her strong emotion, and probably is unable to speak. She weeps at the feet of her Lord. And Jesus doesn’t rebuke her for her emotion, nor does He condemn her for her inability to talk with Him. Jesus also doesn’t complement Mary for her emotional vulnerability or affirm that she is grieving correctly. Jesus accepted the way that Mary grieved in the same way that He accepted the way that Martha grieved. There is NO RIGHT WAY to grieve! There is NO established manner to handle strong emotions; some are wired to express them openly, others are wired to process them privately.

13. The Greek compound word translated “deep anger welled up within Him and he was deeply troubled,” (11:33) indicated a strong emotional reaction in Jesus. (other translations “deeply moved in spirit and troubled,” or “indignant”) The “deep anger” was not directed at Mary or Martha, nor toward the crowd of mourners who were grieving loudly, but rather it was directed toward the root cause of all pain, death. Jesus, being fully God, was aware that death was not part of the original design. Jesus, being fully human, deeply felt the intense pain and experienced the sting of death. Jesus was angry because death caused so much pain and suffering, and He knew that death was the main enemy of those that He loved. Jesus wept, because we weep. Jesus cried, because many of us cry as we try to go on.

14. John 11:35 has become a famous verse, partially because it is so brief! But, why did Jesus weep? This confusing question has puzzled people from the earliest moments, as there was even disagreement from the crowd that day as to why Jesus wept. Jesus was not weeping because he missed His friend Lazarus, as He knew and had already told His disciples that Lazarus would be resurrected. Jesus was also not weeping out of frustration or helplessness that He wasn’t able to do anything. Jesus wept, because death caused so much pain, loss, and suffering to all humans that were made in God’s image.

15. Jesus again was deeply troubled/moved as He stood at the tomb of Lazarus. Once again, Jesus was indignant/angry at the intense suffering that death inflicted upon every human being. As he stood at the very place where the sting of death was most evident, Jesus experienced deep emotions about the wrongness of death.

16. The glory of God was clearly demonstrated by this miracle. It was the ultimate display of Jesus’ miracle-working power, and the final major confirmation given to the Jews that Jesus was Messiah. To be able to raise a man from the dead was beyond any human ability, and only by the power of God would it even be possible.

**Review Questions** 17. (11:17-19) What news did Jesus receive when He arrived at Bethany? What’s significant about the fact that Lazarus had been dead and in his tomb for 4 days? Why did so many people come to visit?

18. (11:20-22) Why did Martha leave her house to meet Jesus? What’s contained in the first words that Martha spoke to Jesus? What emotions? How do we know that Martha had not lost her faith in Jesus?

19. (11:23-24) How did Jesus respond to Martha’s first comments? What amazing assurance did He give to her? What did He actually say, and how did Martha respond? In what manner are they talking?

20. (11:25-26) How did Jesus respond directly, personally, and powerfully to Martha’s, “far off someday theological statement?” What does it mean that Jesus is the “resurrection and the life?” What’s the promise given? How is it kept?

21. (11:27) How does Martha respond to the direct question Jesus asked? What does she affirm? Why did Jesus ask this of her? (Who is this for?) What purpose does this serve? What does Martha believe?

22. (11:28-31) How did Martha try to approach Mary? What happened? Why was Martha able to sneak away earlier but Mary isn’t able to do so? Why did the crowd follow Mary?

23. (11:32) What did Mary say to Jesus? How did she say it? How was this different from Martha’s interaction with Jesus? Why didn’t Mary talk more with Jesus?

24. (11:33-35) How did Jesus respond when He looked at Mary and all of the crowd in their pain and grief? Why did the response of Jesus to this situation include strong emotions including anger? What did He ask? Why did Jesus weep?

25. (11:36-37) How did people respond to Jesus and His emotions? What were some of the early reasons given for Jesus’s tears? What did the critics say?

26. (11:38-40) Why did Jesus experience more strong emotions including more anger? What did He command be done? Why did Martha object? How did Jesus remind everyone of the purpose?

27. (41-44) When they had rolled the stone away, what did Jesus do? How did He address God, and what was being accomplished by the prayer? Why did Jesus call Lazarus out by name? What happened? What did Jesus remind everyone to do?

**So What**? \*28. Imagine Martha’s struggles after word was sent, but Jesus didn’t come. Add to that her strong faith in Jesus as Son of God/Messiah. How is this tension reflected in her words in 11:21-22? Can you identify with Martha? How/when have you felt like that? What did you do?

29. Martha and Mary grieve very differently. How does Jesus handle these differences? How have you experienced grief? Have you felt pressured to grieve like others do?

\*30. Why did Jesus weep? How do you feel about a Savior and Lord who also weeps? How does this encourage and comfort you?

\*31. How do you feel about a Savior and Lord who can raise the dead? How are you reassured by 11:25-26? What does it mean to you that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?