

Signs & Wonders

Dr. Amy-Jill Levine

SESSION 6

The Raising of Lazarus

Taking Death Seriously
(John 11:1-44)

OPENING

Questions: What is your first reaction to the word *resurrection*? Where does your mind go when you think of that word?

Thought: They say grief has no rules, no specific process. Though some commonalities, grief tends to be unique to the individual. There is no right way, but there are a handful of wrong ways.

Question: Where have you seen “odd” expressions of grief?

OVERVIEW

Scripture: The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus... try to retell (AJ will in the video)

Question: Is there anything strange about the title associated with the story/parable?

Scripture: John 11:1-6

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Questions:

- Who is the village of Bethany associated with?
- In the message to Jesus, the name of the one who is ill is not mentioned. Thoughts?
- Why, after hearing that Lazarus was ill, did Jesus stay two more days?

In the Book, AJ writes: People do not suffer so that divine glory can be revealed. Divine glory is revealed when the people who suffer have others to attend to them, to comfort them. Divine glory is revealed when ailing bodies and minds are not burdens but beloved.

Questions: What do you think AJ’s concern might be? What are the practical concerns AJ might be raising?

Scripture: John 11:17-27

ONE: When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

ALL: When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

ONE: But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

ALL: Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

ONE: She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

VIDEO

Question: What is your first takeaway or question from the video?

Scripture: Jesus said to Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” She responded to Jesus, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Question: What is Martha’s expectation?

In the Book, AJ writes: Here’s John’s miracle. When Jesus says to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die,” he is collapsing time. No longer does eternal life mean something later; it means something now. The technical term for this concept is “realized eschatology,” that is, the realization that the benefits people then, and people now, associated with the end time are available now, in the present, when orientation shifts.

Question: What do you think AJ means by “orientation shifts”?

In the Book, AJ writes: The name Lazarus, a form of Eliezer, means “God helps.” Here is Johannine irony, for the name initially seems to be emptied of meaning. The sisters have asked for help, but help is not immediately forthcoming. “Bethany” likely derives from the Hebrew for “house” (bet) “of affliction” (oni). Another irony, for the affliction, the illness and death of Lazarus, will turn to joy. In John’s Gospel, words tend to mean more than they initially seem.

Scripture: In Luke 16, we find the other Lazarus story in which the rich man pleads from Hade for the sake of his brothers. He says, “...if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.” Abraham said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”