

LAZARUS: The Man Jesus Loved

In the raising of Lazarus, the Gospel of John exemplifies the decisive power of Jesus over humanity's last and most dictating enemy - death.

For the LGBTQ community, this resurrection story may well come to symbolize God's promise of life to those excluded, marginalized or emotionally imprisoned. "Lazarus, come out!" commands Jesus in a loud voice, and to the people around, Jesus further directs, "Unbind him, and let him go!"



JOHN 11: 17 - 44

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived in Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Since Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ many people had come out to console Martha and Mary about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home with the mourners.

²¹ When she got to Jesus, Martha said, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³ Jesus assured her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and those who are alive and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes!" Martha replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, God's Only Begotten, the One who is to come into the world."

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she whispered, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ Those who were there, consoling her, saw her get up quickly and followed Mary, thinking she was going to the tomb to mourn.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the other mourners as well, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see,” they replied. ³⁵ And Jesus wept.

³⁶ The people in the crowd began to remark, “See how much he loved him!” ³⁷ Others said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” Jesus directed. “But, Rabbi,” said Martha, “by this time there will be a stench, for he has been there four days.” ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Abba, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

FOR REFLECTION

1. A crucial event in the life of an LGBT person is the intimate interior recognition of one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Sometimes, many years pass before this reality can become clear. Coming-out to oneself often gradually leads to a second crucial event: coming out to others. What has been your experience of coming to terms with your sexual orientation and/or gender identity? How has this recognition helped or hindered your coming-out to yourself and others? If you are an ally, how does this story relate to your "coming out" as an ally?
2. Sometimes the pains and disappointments of life simply overwhelm us. We feel crushed, defeated, demoralized, shattered. When this happens, we cry out to

God blindly, hoping and despairing in turns. In your own life-story, how has grief and hope worked together given your faith in Jesus?

3. Jesus wept. In Jesus we have a vulnerable God who is not afraid to express emotions. Does this comfort or confuse you? Why?
4. In coming out of the tomb, Lazarus is emerging from darkness and death to light and life. How do you see yourself in this metaphor?
5. Have you heard the voice of Jesus say to you, "Come out?" If so, how was this voice manifested?
6. The story ends with Jesus directing the local community to assist Lazarus with removing the symbols of the tomb and to let him go. What "grave clothes" is Jesus commanding others to take from you? How can church communities today assist LGBT people and allies in the coming-out process.



PRAYER

God of our ancestors, you inspire honesty and courage, and support those who speak the truth.

Help us to rejoice in our coming out of our graves as we strip off the bandages and shrouds that weigh us down.

Send your Holy Spirit to hover over our hearts and our homes. Put a new and noble spirit in our lives and affections that we may love and serve you and those who surround us, today and all the days of our lives.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, Amen.