

# Lazarus

## John 11:1-45



*Year A Lent 5 ; Year B All  
Saints Day (Revised); Year  
B All Saints Day  
(Episcopal)*

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part    ▲ = medium sized part    ● = small part

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•	Lazarus - the brother of Martha and Mary, who returns from the dead not as happy as one might have guessed								▲	
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Scene 1

Jesus , Joanna , Judas

{At the disciples' camp near Bethany.}

**Joanna** Is the rabbi up? I need to talk to him.

**Judas** I was actually looking for him myself.

**Joanna** Would it be all right if I spoke with him first? My issue is pretty urgent.

**Judas** Mine is too, but sure. What's your thing?

**Joanna** I want to find out why we haven't gone into Bethany yet.

**Judas** Why would we want to go there?

**Joanna** We got a letter from Martha and Mary a couple of days ago saying that their brother Lazarus was sick and calling for the rabbi to come see him. I just heard about it and saw the letter. It arrived two days ago, but we've just been sitting here ever since.

**Judas** Really? I never heard anything about a letter. What I wanted to talk to him about was why we were hanging around here doing nothing all this time. The timing of the letter would make me suspect a link, but the link would be backwards!

{Jesus enters.}

**Jesus** Good morning!

**Joanna** Rabbi, did you read the letter that came two days ago?

**Jesus** I did.

**Joanna** The letter from Martha and Mary.

**Jesus** That was the letter.

**Joanna** You read it? The whole thing? Yourself?

**Jesus** *[solemnly]* I know its contents.

**Joanna** And you saw it when it arrived two days ago:

**Jesus** Yes.

**Joanna** But...but then...why haven't we gone into the village? Why have we been camping out here just a few hours away for the past two days?

**Jesus** Don't worry, we're going in today.

**Judas** Actually, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. I don't think it's a good idea for us to be in this region at all, much less in Bethany. I didn't know about Lazarus before, but still: you remember what happened the last time you were there, don't you?

**Jesus** Nothing happened.

**Judas** You almost got stoned! "Nothing happened" because you managed to give the mob the slip! I know you're close to that family, but unless the man is at death's door, I think we should stay clear.

**Jesus** And if he *is* at death's door?

**Judas** Well, I suppose if he's that bad off...wait a minute: if he was close to death, why didn't you go to him right away?

**Jesus** *[firmly]* We're going now. Tell the others to break camp!

**Joanna** I'm glad you're finally going, but why now, after two days?

**Jesus** Because Lazarus has just fallen asleep, and I must go and wake him.

**Joanna** Did we receive another letter with an update?

**Judas** Rabbi, if he's sleeping, it means he's getting better. Are you sure we need to take the risk now?

**Jesus** *[gently]* Judas, Joanna, Lazarus is dead.

## Scene 2

## Martha , Mary

*{Martha tries to comfort a weeping Mary.}*

**Martha** *[kindly but firmly]* Mary, you've got to pull yourself together!

**Mary** He's dead! He's dead!

**Martha** He's in a better place. He's in the bosom of Abraham. Do you believe that or not? And some day, at the Resurrection, we'll see him again.

**Mary** I want to see him now!

**Martha** *[slightly more sternly, but still gently]* Mary, you're just thinking of your own feelings. He was sick. He was suffering. It's better for him this way, however much we might miss him.

**Mary** *[with a little anger]* He could have saved him. He could have come!

**Martha** I know, but he must have gotten our message too late. Or maybe it hasn't even caught up with him yet. You know he's always on the move.

**Mary** You think he needed our letter to know? He knows everything! He had to know - and he didn't come. He let Lazarus die!

**Martha** *[wholly reproofing now]* Mary! You know he loved him. You know he loved *us*! He would never do anything to hurt us. And I don't care how upset you are, you can't speak like that about God's Anointed.

**Mary** *[in a low voice, half to herself]* If he's the Messiah, he doesn't even know what death is. He doesn't know how we suffer!

## Scene 3

Jesus , Phillip

*{Back at the camp, the group is just about ready to head for the village.}*

**Phillip** Rabbi?

**Jesus** Yes?

**Phillip** If you like, I can stay behind and watch the stuff. That way, you can go right away.

**Jesus** There's no need for haste any more.

**Phillip** Well, it would save everybody a lot of work, too. We're only going to pass back this way when we leave the village, so why carry everything in and then out again?

**Jesus** We couldn't leave you alone out here. We'd worry about your safety.

**Phillip** But...I mean...

**Jesus** You're more worried about your safety in the village, aren't you?

**Phillip** Yes, it's true. I'm sorry.

**Jesus** Fear not, Phillip. The reason I was able to evade that mob so easily is that they walked in darkness, while I walk in the light. A man who can see the world around him can never be cornered by the blind. And think about what you'll miss if you don't come! Something wonderful is going to happen in the village, something that will bring great glory to God and to his Son. You'll be very sorry if you don't see it for yourself!

**Phillip** All right. I'll come. And I'll try to keep my eyes open!

## **Scene 4**

**Martha , Peter**

*{Martha gets word of the approach of Jesus and is waiting by the main road for them.}*

**Martha** Peter! My favorite house cleaner!

**Peter** Martha!

**Martha** He's coming, then, right?

**Peter** They're about 20 minutes behind me. I came ahead to...you know...

**Martha** To check for danger, I know. I'm so grateful to all of you for coming even after what happened last time. But you should know: He's too late; Lazarus died this morning. So you might run back and tell him that...that I'll understand if you want to avoid Bethany for a little while longer.

**Peter** I'm sorry. If only you'd sent for us sooner. We've actually been just a few hours away for the past two days!

**Martha** What?

**Peter** We were just on the other side of that hill.

**Martha** And you say you got my letter only today?

**Peter** I assume it was today.

**Martha** Did you see it arrive? The messenger would have been a tall Phoenician man.

**Peter** We didn't have any visitors this morning, but come to think of it, I did see a tall foreigner in the camp two days ago when we first arrived.

**Martha** Two days ago! Mary was right.

**Peter** About what?

**Martha** *[decisively]* Listen, as soon as the rabbi arrives, the moment he sets foot in the village, you send him straight to me, do you understand?

**Peter** Sure. But what's up?

**Martha** I don't know, yet. But I will!

## Scene 5

Phillip , Thomas

*{Phillip and Thomas talk on the walk into the village.}*

**Phillip** I can't believe you aren't scared. You must have more faith than you let on.

**Thomas** What makes you think I'm not scared?

**Phillip** You're going into the village with us without objecting or trying to get out of it or anything. You and Joanna were just about the only ones who didn't try to stop him.

**Thomas** Well, it wasn't because I believed he had the power to protect us from the mob.

**Phillip** Then what was it?

**Thomas** *[matter-of-factly]* It was nothing. I think we could be killed.

**Phillip** *[anxiously]* Then why didn't you say anything? Why are you still with us?

**Thomas** Where else would I go? Everybody's going to die some time, and one could do worse than die with one's friends.

## Scene 6

Jesus , Martha

*{Martha meets Jesus.}*

**Martha** Welcome, rabbi.

**Jesus** I'm sorry we have to meet again under these circumstances.

**Martha** *[not angrily, but as one doer to another]* If you had come sooner, I know you could have healed him. Why did you delay?

**Jesus** That God might be glorified.

**Martha** I understand. Not our will, but His be done. And yet, I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.

**Jesus** *[brightening]* Ah. Then you know what's about to happen!

**Martha** What? Well, we're going to tomb soon to perform the service. I'm glad you made it for that, despite the danger.

**Jesus** *[disappointed that she didn't know what was about to happen, after all, as her statement seemed to imply]* Martha, your brother will rise again.

**Martha** *[bravely]* I know, rabbi. At the Ressurrection of the Last Day.

**Jesus** I am the Resurrection, and the Life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die. And those who believe in me and live will never die. Do you believe this?

**Martha** *[a little uncertainly, hanging on to the one thing she knows for sure]* I believe you're the Messiah, the Son of God.

**Jesus** Good enough. Take me to him.

## Scene 7

Peter , Thomas

*{Thomas and Peter observe the events at the grave of Lazaarus from the edges of the crowd.}*

**Thomas** Two days?

**Peter** Yeah, what do you make of it?

**Thomas** Maybe he knew that if he came earlier, he'd be expected to heal him.

**Peter** That's what I can't figure out. Why wouldn't he want to do that?

**Thomas** Maybe he knew he wouldn't be able to.

**Peter** *[good naturedly]* You skeptics!

**Thomas** I see Martha, but where's Mary? I hope she's okay.

**Peter** Martha said she was kind of out of it - no, wait, there she is.

**Thomas** She looks terrible. Poor kid.

**Peter** *[in a concerned tone]* She looks angry.



**Thomas**     What? How can you tell -

**Peter**        *[in alarm]* She's attacking him!

*{Mary starts hitting Jesus. Peter makes to go to Jesus' aid, but Thomas restrains him.}*

**Thomas**     Hold on! Hold on! Don't worry, I think he can defend himself against one grief stricken woman. See? She's collapsed at his feet.

**Peter**        But did you see that? She was wailing on him!

**Thomas**     I suppose she was just giving vent to her grief.

**Peter**        But why against the rabbi? He didn't kill her brother.

**Thomas**     What about those two days?

**Peter**        Oh! I didn't think about that. She must have found out.

**Thomas**     What are they doing now?

**Peter**        What the...? It looks like they're opening up the tomb!

**Thomas**     Why would they do that?

**Peter**        I have no idea, but I'm glad we're watching it from way back here. It's going to stink to high heaven.

**Thomas**     *[suddenly horrified]* What - what is *that*?

**Peter**        What are you talking - *[in terror]* oh my God! It's coming out of the tomb!

*{There are shouts of alarm and horror and confusion from the crowd, which can be ad-libbed by all the readers if they like.}*

## Scene 8

James , Jesus , Lazarus

*{A big party is thrown to celebrate the revival of Lazarus.}*

**James**        *[boisterously]* Woo hoo! Party! Rabbi, what are you and the guest of honor doing hiding away in this dark corner? Come out and celebrate! See those men over there? They were the ones who tried

to stone you last time, and now they want to appoint you honorary mayor!

**Jesus** *[in a calm tone]* We'll join you shortly. We're just discussing a few things.

**James** *[shouting]* The rabbi rules! Martha, Martha, another toast! Where's Mary? Someone drag her out here! We've got to toast the whole family!

*{James exits. There's a long silence between Lazarus and Jesus before Lazarus speaks.}*

**Lazarus** *[in a quiet, neutral voice]* I suppose I should thank you.

**Jesus** Should you?

**Lazarus** I'm glad to be here again. I am. And my sisters, and everybody: everybody's happy.

**Jesus** Except...

**Lazarus** Except...I have to die again now. I don't want to taste death again.

**Jesus** Even knowing what lies beyond it?

**Lazarus** Death is death, whatever comes next. And I *was* beyond it.

**Jesus** Until I called you back.

**Lazarus** Why did you do it? I'm told you wept at my tomb. What were you crying over? My sisters' grief? My suffering, which had ended?

**Jesus** I'm not sure. Death is a darkness; we're all blind in that night. Except for you, now, among all the living.

**Lazarus** Surely not just me. Surely you know, too.

**Jesus** Why would I?

**Lazarus** Because...well, because you were there!

**Jesus** I called you back to this side of the door. You heard my voice only. I never passed through it myself.

**Lazarus** *[in wonder]* Then you don't know.

**Jesus** You asked me why I called you back, and there were many reasons, some of them in my control and some not. But one of them might have been so you could now tell me.

**Lazarus** Tell you...how it felt to...?

**Jesus** Yes. Tell me how it felt to die.

## Scene 9

Jesus , Martha , Mary

*{Long after the party is over, Mary and Jesus have a muted, emotionally exhausted reconciliation.}*

**Martha** Goodnight, rabbi.

**Jesus** Goodnight, Martha.

**Martha** I must admit, you surprised me today. I always believed you could do anything, but I didn't realize you could do *anything*.

*{Mary enters.}*

**Martha** Mary! How are you feeling? Are you hungry? Can I get you anything?

*{Mary makes no answer.}*

**Martha** Mary, I was just leaving the rabbi to his sleep. Come help me put a few last things away and we'll get to bed ourselves.

*{Still no reply from Mary.}*

**Jesus** Martha? Could you excuse us?

**Martha** Oh! Of course. Goodnight again.

**Jesus** Goodnight, Martha.

*{Martha exits. After a pause, Mary speaks.}*

**Mary** *[somberly all the way through]* You let him die.

**Jesus** *[with equal solemnity]* And then I brought him back to life.

**Mary** Still, he died.

**Jesus** Yes.

**Mary** Does coming back to life make death any easier?

**Jesus** No. It seems not.

**Mary** You could have come in time to spare him that, but you deliberately stayed away.

**Jesus** Yes.

**Mary** So you could turn it into a lesson for the people.

**Jesus** A lesson for all of us, for each of us. But it was a costly lesson - to you and your sister, to Lazarus, to my disciples, to everybody.

**Mary** Why did you do it?

**Jesus** Sometimes, it's not up to me. Nevertheless, I'm sorry for the pain I caused.

**Mary** *You* cried, too.

*{A pause while Jesus doesn't reply.}*

**Mary** Was that the first time you ever cried?

**Jesus** As an adult, yes.

**Mary** How did it feel?

**Jesus** Miraculous. Bitterness melts into sadness, pain into longing, struggle into acceptance. You start off as big as the universe and end up smaller than a mustard seed. You start off as hard and self contained as a grain of wheat, and end up as diffuse as the air of the world.

**Mary** Do you think you'll ever cry again?

**Jesus** Once more, I think. Once more at least.

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*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at*  
***[www.WineskinProject.net/blog/lazarus](http://www.WineskinProject.net/blog/lazarus)***

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