

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Where Are You God? When God Doesn't Show Up

John 11:1-44

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Today we are going to address a question that all of us struggle with: Why doesn't God do something about that? Why doesn't God do anything about the pain and suffering in the world? I am sure many of you have asked that question. You watch the news or look at your news feed and you wonder why God has not shown up? Maybe you are dealing with a personal crisis and you wonder why God has not shown up.

As we wrap up our series, "Where Are You God?" we are going to address this problem. For the last two weeks we have talked about how sometimes in life we feel that God is distant or doesn't care. He is not answering our prayers. He is not moving on our behalf. We think maybe God does not like us or we did something wrong or maybe God has abandoned us.

What we have learned in this series is that our difficult circumstances do not reflect how God feels about us. We have also learned that we do not have to abandon our faith. We can remain strong and faithful in the midst of such dark times. God is there and he is faithful.

People back in Jesus' day struggled with the very same issues. They were just as frustrated and upset as we are. "Jesus, why don't you do something about that?" Today we are going to find out how Jesus responded to that question.

Now Jesus was very clever in the way he taught and got his message across. He was very effective. He told stories and parables that everyone could understand. The Bible says that people heard Jesus "gladly."

The interesting thing is that when it came to the question we are addressing today Jesus chose a different teaching tactic. Instead of giving a parable or a sermon about it he decided to create an event or a scenario that would communicate his lesson in a powerful way. Actually, he decided to make his followers tell the story.

We are going to look at this story today. It is one of the most amazing stories in the Bible. It is the story of Lazarus in John 11. What Jesus gives us through this real life story is a powerful and comforting truth we can hold close to us in the darkest times in our lives.

Let's take a look at the story. **John 11:1-3 says:**

**Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."**

Okay, so word got to Jesus that the one he loved was sick. Lazarus was not even mentioned. Jesus would have known who that was. They didn't even have to say his name. He knew it was Lazarus. Jesus and Lazarus had a special friendship. I'm sure Lazarus was rather proud of that. I imagine he would have worn the modern t-shirt that reads: "Jesus Loves You, But I'm his favorite!"

**4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."**

Wow! Now this is when Jesus starts setting up this whole story, this whole event to teach his disciples one of the most important lessons. It was as if Jesus said, "Lazarus will not die. God is going to be glorified through all of this! You won't believe what is going to happen. Hold on. Pay attention."

**5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.**

Wait a minute! It says Jesus loved Lazarus, so that is why he didn't do anything? He just stayed there two more days. He loved him so much that he didn't do anything? This great healer didn't respond

immediately? Well, hold on. Remember Jesus intended to teach a lesson.

**7 And then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” 8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”**

The disciples were saying, “Uh Jesus, do you remember the last time you were there? You are not well loved in Judea, remember! They tried to stone you! And, uh, Jesus when they throw rocks at you those rocks can also hit us! Let’s just hang out here for awhile. Can’t you just heal Lazarus in by sending a bird over there or something?”

**9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. 10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”**

What did Jesus mean by this strange response? He was giving them a hint that he was about to give them a light of truth that would allow them to walk through any darkness. We could all use that light of truth. All of us go through dark periods of time and seasons. In fact, some of you may be going through such darkness right now. Well, the light is coming. Let’s continue the story.

**11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” 12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”**

The disciples were confused again. “What? Believe what? You are not there. He is dead. This is why we will believe? Believe what? Wake him up? We are confused Jesus!” Jesus said they wouldn’t be confused for long and told them to pack their bags because they were going to Judea to see Lazarus.

And then Thomas, there is always one in a group, had to be the “Debbie Downer.” There is always a Grumpy Smurf in every group. This is what Thomas said sarcastically:

**16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”**

Thomas way saying, “We are all gonna die. He will get stoned. We will get stoned. Let’s just get it over with.” So they get there and this is what they find:

**17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.**

So imagine the scene. Jesus finally gets there. Lazarus had been dead for four days. A huge crowd of people had gathered for this wake and were trying to comfort Mary and Martha in their grief. Imagine how embarrassed the disciples were. They got these angry looks from all these people. “This Jesus you are following, this great healer, gets here 4 days late! Where have you been? It is too late!” In fact, Martha was hot. She was angry at Jesus. Look what happens:

**20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “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.”**

Martha sees Jesus and she is so angry. Mary is so upset she can’t even face Jesus. So Martha runs out to Jesus. And remember this is the same Martha who said to Jesus in Luke, “Tell Martha to stop listening to your sermons and help me in the kitchen.” Martha had an attitude. She said, “Where have you been? I called for you a couple of days ago. If you had been here, he wouldn’t have died! You go around healing everyone and performing all these miracles and yet you couldn’t even come and save your closest friend. What’s the matter with you? Now do something about this. I know you have the power. Do something!”

**23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”**

Martha is like, “Yeah, yeah. I know he is in a better place. We will see him in heaven one day. We will see him again. I know all that. Don’t give me a theology lesson Jesus. You should have been here! Don’t try to talk your way out of this!”

**25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, 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 said, “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 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

Can you imagine the scene? There is Mary and she collapses at Jesus’ feet and cries to Jesus, “Why weren’t you here? My brother would not have died!” I think we have all been there haven’t we? “Lord, if you had just healed my mom she would still be here....If you had just intervened my life would not be a complete mess... Lord, why didn’t you help me.”

**33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.**

So Jesus was deeply moved by everyone’s grief. Then John tells us something that is so remarkable and so healing for those of us who are in pain:

**35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”**

Jesus cried. He grieved. It’s as if Jesus says to your pain and grief today, “I know. I know. I understand. I feel that pain. I cry with you and I grieve with you. I know. I know.” And they all could see how much Jesus cared. Of course, there were others who asked that question we all ask:

**37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”**

In other words, “Why couldn’t he have done anything about that? He healed all of these people and performed

all of these miracles. Why didn’t he do anything?” I think a lot of us would have been in that camp! But Jesus was moved again:

**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,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”**

Martha said, “Uh Jesus, you don’t want to do that. He’s been in there for four days and he is going to stink to high heaven. You don’t want to do that. Trust me. He has been dead for four days.” Then Jesus said something so true and so powerful:

**40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”**

Jesus persisted, “Don’t you hear what I keep saying? Didn’t I tell if you believe you will see God’s hand and power in this? You will see his glory. Just believe! Just hold on. You are not going to believe what happens next. Just hold on.

Then Jesus walks to the side to talk to God just so everyone will know he is talking to God. Jesus always prayed to God. But it was a gesture so they would all know he was relying on the power of God. This is what he says:

**41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, 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.”**

And then it happens:

**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.”**

Imagine this moment. Are you kidding me? This is nuts. They couldn’t believe their eyes. They were shocked! I’m sure some fainted. And Jesus said, “Somebody take his grave clothes off.” And they said, “Uh huh, not me. He has been in there for four days. I’m not going near him. I’m not touching those

things!” But Lazarus came out of the tomb and was alive again! And maybe Jesus said under this breath... There is your lesson.

When things look bleak and dark and life is painful remember this story! Jesus said, **“If you believe you will see the glory of God!”** Why doesn’t God show up on time? Why doesn’t God just act? I don’t know, but I know this. Sometimes for some reason we have to wait on God. But he is all powerful and when we stay faithful and keep believing we will see his glory, his hand in our situation.

I don’t know what you are going through in your life and I don’t know why God has not acted or healed it or made it better but I know this: God has never left you and he is all powerful and if you keep believing and stay faithful you will see his glory. You will his hand. You will see him work good out of evil. He will take something ugly and make it beautiful. He will turn something bad into something good. You will see his glory. I promise. Keep believing and stay faithful. Amen.



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