*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

April 1 - 6

*Jesus in John’s Gospel*

**Monday, April 1 John 11:45-50**

*“What are we going to do?”*

Most of the miracles of Jesus led to a sharp division in the audience. The same occurs here. Many of the Jews in Bethany who witnessed the raising of Lazarus “put their faith in him” – one of John’s favorite phrases to express true belief in Jesus. They have seen the glory of God at work (as promised) and rightly link it to the person of Jesus. John’s sharp contrast with the “others” in verse 46, who go directly to the Pharisees, suggests they do not believe.

The popularity of Jesus and the sheer power of this miracle bring a crisis to the ruling council of Jerusalem (the Sanhedrin). Even if the story of Lazarus were untrue (as some of the leaders no doubt contend), still the rumor of it will spread in the city like wildfire. They have a fear that the populace will accept Jesus as the Messiah. This is not simply religious rivalry, but a great concern that if a messianic claimant is embraced by the city, the Roman armies will suppress it. The Romans had shown their intolerance to this sort of messianism in the past (viewing it as a political challenge), and Jerusalem’s leadership know the seriousness of the threat.

*People are divided over you, Jesus, but I have put my faith in you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 2 John 11:51-54**

*“The Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus’ death”*

Just as Jesus’ miracles have double levels of meaning, so too these leaders’ voices say more than they knew. Indeed, both of the comments from the Sanhedrin bear some truth. (1) The Romans will eventually come and bring their judgment on the city and its temple. From 66-70AD Jerusalem was under siege, which concluded with the destruction of the temple. (2) Jesus will die for the salvation of the nation. Indeed, his death on the cross will offer salvation not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles.

This threat to Jesus leads him to make a move. Today we would say that he goes “underground” – Jesus cannot risk being a public figure in the same manner any longer. He knows the time appointed by the Father of his death and resurrection, and he will not permit anyone or anything to interrupt it. So, he moves to Ephraim, a small town about a dozen miles north of Jerusalem, where he is safe from the Sanhedrin but close enough to attend the upcoming Passover in Jerusalem.

*No one is able, Jesus, to thwart the plans of the Father. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 3 John 11:55-57**

*“It was almost time for the Jewish Passover”*

As an orthodox Jew, Jesus would have faithfully obeyed the requirement of attending the annual pilgrimage festivals such as Passover. As men and women begin moving toward the city from throughout the country, they look for Jesus. Residents of Jerusalem no doubt spread the story of Lazarus, and the city is buzzing with talk about the intentions of the religious authorities. An open announcement of arrest is circulating for Jesus. If he is seen, he will be captured. With the crowds filing the city, “Jesus stories” add to the excitement. There will be a showdown. What about his supporters from Galilee? Will his twelve followers try to defend him? What will this do to the upcoming Passover celebrations?

But from Jesus’ point of view, his public ministry among his people is coming to an end. No longer will he provide miraculous signs that evoke belief. He now will spend concentrated private time with those families (e.g., Martha, Mary and Lazarus), friends, and followers who know him, trust him, and believe in him.

*While others may wonder who you are, Jesus, I know and believe in you. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

April 1 - 6

*Jesus in John’s Gospel*

**Thursday, April 4 John 12:1-8**

*“She did this in preparation for my burial”*

As the Passover approaches, Jesus moves to Bethany (a village just east of Jerusalem) and remains with the family of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. The family is no doubt living with a keen sense of fear and are dreading the tragedy of Jesus’ arrest that seems to lie on the near horizon. Mary feels the weight of these momentous days. During a meal hosted by Martha she anoints Jesus with nard, a rare and precious spice imported from northern India. While Judas objects, Jesus finds in Mary’s dramatic gesture a pleasing expression of devotion.

This act of love is so extravagant that Judas, who obviously feels it has been a waste, asks piously why this money could not have been given to the poor. He asks this not because he cares, but because he is a thief. In Jewish thought, preparation for death was an act of mercy, a greater “good work” than justice, which included almsgiving for the poor. So Jesus commends Mary, not because he is indifferent to the poor, but because she has done a generous work of kindness preparing for his death.

*May I always be generous, Jesus, on your behalf. Amen.*

**Friday, April 5 Luke 10:38-42**

*“Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary”*

This story can be considered from two angels. One involves the perspective of Martha, who is clearly upset at the lack of help Mary provides in offering Jesus a meal: “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work?” The way the question is asked in Greek makes it clear that Martha anticipates a positive answer to her question. She expects Jesus to come to her aid. Martha is performing a worthy task, but she is consumed with what others are doing. Jesus does not criticize her for what she is doing but for being concerned about others’ activities.

From the standpoint of Mary emerges the example of someone willing to sit at Jesus’ feet and fellowship with him as his disciple. There is something tranquil in what Mary does. Often in the hustle and bustle of life, we need to pause for a moment of reflection before the Lord. Jesus’ emotion-filled reply to Martha, speaking her name twice, indicates just how appropriate it is for this sister to sit before him. She has chosen a needful thing, a good thing. Discipleship sometimes requires that tasks be suspended while fellowship is maintained.

*There is a time for service, Jesus, and a time for quiet listening. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 6 John 12:9-11**

*“The chief priests decided to kill Lazarus, too”*

Many people begin to arrive in Bethany. Jesus’ reputation has spread through Jerusalem and its surrounding villages. Now there is a double reason to make the short journey to see him. Not only is Jesus there, but they can see Lazarus too, the “miracle man” who was dead but is now alive. What does he look like? Can he tell us what it was like to be dead? Did he see a bright light, or hear angels’ voices? Lazarus is a source of curiosity, to be sure, but he has also become a source of new faith in Jesus.

Therefore the Sanhedrin determines that Lazarus must also die. What good is it if they kill Jesus but allow someone like Lazarus to still be around to remind Jesus’ admirers of why they believe in him? Ironically, the chief priests want to return Lazarus to the place from whence he came (the grave) but, from Lazarus’ perspective, it is a desire that has been emptied of its threat. Lazarus now knows the power of Jesus over the grave. Yes, he will die again, one way or another, but he is forever linked to the One who is the Resurrection and the Life.

*Even death, Jesus, is unable to stop the Good News from being spread. Amen.*