

US DISASTER PROGRAM

The Impact of Death



Bible Study for times of disaster

THE STORY OF LAZARUS

Read John 11: 1-44

John 11 tells the story of the death of Lazarus and of his being brought back to life by Jesus. The text can be read in many different ways. Here, the invitation is to focus on the impact of illness and death on a family, a friendship and a community. What do we see in this passage that can help us think about how best to help those suffering from a potentially deadly illness?

The first 14 verses make clear that a person's illness does not happen in isolation. When Lazarus falls ill, it is a concern to his sisters Martha and Mary, an issue for Lazarus's friend Jesus and the people who surround him and a matter that affects Lazarus's home community of Bethany.

By the time that Jesus makes it to Bethany, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. His passing is a public matter (v 19 – "many of the Jews had come"). His passing also acts to shape the relationships that exist between Jesus and Lazarus's sisters, Martha and Mary. Both sisters' first comment could be read as recrimination and potentially the cause for an argument (see v 21 and v 32, where each sister says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died").

Jesus faces a situation where the only outcome possible appears to be death, loss, mourning and grief (vv 38-39). No one wants him to open the tomb. No one thinks he can do anything. Yet Jesus acts through his power to bring life, healing and restoration (vv 40-44). The stone that seals the tomb is rolled away. Lazarus is commanded to leave the tomb and is restored to life.

Lazarus is brought back to life after four days of being lost for dead (v 44). Within the Gospel, Lazarus is mentioned once more, when he and his sisters give a dinner for Jesus (John

"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (John 11:33-36).

Adapted from *La foi en temps d'Ebola* by Dr. Isaac Muyonga and Rt. Rev. Michael Beasley



12: 1-7). John's Gospel doesn't say what effect the experience of his death and restoration had on Lazarus or his sisters. The events do continue to affect the wider community (John 12: 9-11 and John 12: 17-19).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Imagine that a member of your church has tested positive for an infectious disease. Think about all of that person's community ties and relationships. Do you feel called to step in and help fulfill some of the member's usual duties in the community?
2. In the face of an epidemic, what are the factors – such as the stigmatization of those who have recovered from infection – that hold people in death in your community? How can you be one with Jesus in helping such factors to be overcome, enabling restoration to life among the people where you are?
3. Imagine what Lazarus, Martha and Mary had to say afterward about the events of John 11:1-44. How would they come to terms with the reality that Lazarus had been dead but then brought back to life? How do you think people who have been infected with an infectious disease and their families feel after a person either has recovered from an infection or has died? What might good support to people in their position look like?