

“Even When I Don’t Understand” John 11:1–44

(Say the title because it’s not in the bulletin)

Goodmorning! I am excited to have this opportunity to share my thoughts on this story with you today. Thank you to Pastor Lois and Pastor Chris for assisting me in creating my sermon. I am also a little nervous, so I ask for some grace. Honestly, when I volunteered, I did **not** realize what I was getting into, but I think I really needed this to help me grow and become rooted in my faith. I’ve been sitting with the story in John 11 where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. It’s one of the most powerful miracles in the Bible, other than Jesus’s own resurrection. But the more I read it, the more I notice it’s also a story filled with questions. It’s about grief, confusion, waiting, and emotions that don’t always make sense. And if I’m honest, there are parts of it that still confuse me.

We were running through youth Sunday this past wednesday and I heard Delaney and Bella do the welcoming they had written. I had heard the line “God brings life, hope, and renewal even in difficult times.” It stuck with me. So as crazy as it was, I went home that night and completely restarted my sermon because the moment I heard that, I knew. That is what I want my sermon to be centered around. So, the truth I keep coming back to is this: God brings life, hope, and renewal even in difficult times. But sometimes I struggle with the “how” and the “why.”

The story begins with Lazarus getting very sick. His sisters, Mary and Martha, send word to Jesus: “Lord, the one you love is sick.” That sentence feels full of trust. They don’t panic. They don’t beg. They simply tell Him, almost like they’re confident He will come right away.

But He doesn’t.

Jesus waits two more days before leaving.

And I can’t help but wonder, why? If He loved Lazarus, why not go immediately? If He knew Lazarus would die, why allow that pain? Why let the sisters go through those four days of grief?

That part feels uncomfortable. It feels confusing. It feels like the kind of situation where you might ask, “Jesus, what are You doing?”

Maybe that’s what makes this story so real. Because most of us know what it feels like to pray and then wait. To ask for help and feel like God is taking His time. Waiting can feel like silence. It can feel like distance. It can even feel like abandonment.

But the Bible clearly says Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. So His delay wasn't a lack of love. It must have been part of something bigger, something they couldn't see yet. Something I haven't been able to find myself.

By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been dead for four days. Martha hears He is coming and goes out to meet Him. She says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." That statement sounds honest, but it also sounds like it carries some pain. It's almost like she's saying, "You could have stopped this."

And then there's Mary.

Martha runs to Jesus. Mary stays in the house at first. I've wondered why. Mary loved Jesus deeply. She had sat at His feet before. So why didn't she go out right away?

Was she too heartbroken to move?

Was she overwhelmed?

Or was she angry?

And another question comes up for me: Did Mary blame Jesus for Lazarus's death?

When Mary finally does come out and sees Jesus, she falls at His feet and says the exact same words Martha said: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

It's the same sentence. And it makes me stop and think.

That sentence could simply be grief. It could be sorrow. But it could also hold disappointment. Maybe even blame. Maybe Mary was thinking, "You didn't come. You could have prevented this."

And honestly, that feels very human.

There are moments in life when we quietly blame God. We may not say it out loud, but we think it. "If You had stepped in sooner..." "If You had answered that prayer..." "If You had stopped this..."

What I notice is that Jesus doesn't correct her. He doesn't defend Himself. He doesn't say, "You don't understand." He sees her crying, sees the others weeping, and He is deeply moved.

And then we read the simple but powerful words: "Jesus wept."

That detail means so much to me. Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus. He knew the miracle was coming. But He still stopped and cried.

That tells me something important: even if Mary did blame Him, even if her words carried frustration or disappointment, He didn't pull away. He moved closer.

Jesus is not afraid of our questions.
He is not threatened by our confusion.
He is not offended by our grief.

He meets us in it.

Then Jesus goes to the tomb. He tells them to take away the stone. Martha hesitates and says, "Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." In other words, "It's too late."

That's another feeling that seems familiar. Too late for change. Too late for healing. Too late for restoration.

But Jesus stands in front of what looks final and calls out, "Lazarus, come out."

And Lazarus walks out of the grave.

That moment changes everything. What looked permanent wasn't. What looked hopeless wasn't. What felt final wasn't.

But even then, Lazarus comes out still wrapped in grave clothes. He is alive, but he is still bound. And Jesus tells the people to unwrap him.

That part reminds me that sometimes God brings life in an instant, but renewal can take time. Sometimes He answers the big prayer, but we still have layers of hurt, doubt, or fear that need to be gently removed. Being brought back to life doesn't mean everything feels normal right away. It means the process has started.

When I think about this whole story, I still don't fully understand why Jesus waited two days. I still wonder what Mary was thinking in those first moments. I still ask whether she blamed Him. The Bible doesn't spell out every emotion, and maybe that's intentional. Maybe it leaves space for us to see our own emotions there.

But what I do see clearly is this: Jesus showed up. He cared. He cried. And He brought life.

Even when there was confusion.
Even when there was grief.
Even when there may have been blame.

And that's why I hold onto this truth: God brings life, hope, and renewal even in difficult times.

Not because we always understand Him.

Not because we never question.

But because even when we are confused, hurting, or unsure, Jesus is still the resurrection and the life.

And sometimes faith isn't having all the answers.

Sometimes it's simply trusting that even when we don't understand, God is still working.