

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

Broken Beyond Fixing

(John 10:1--11:45)

Study #7

Introduction: Fixer-Uppers Anonymous...

People who are (like me) "*frugal*" (stingy / cheap), see great value in fixing what's broken.

Over the years I've actually fixed a number of things: kids' toys, yard tools, appliances, cars, even plumbing and electrical.

And I'm really not all that good at fixing things. I know people who are way better at fixing stuff than I am. I'm just rarely in the mood to buy something new. Like I said. I'm...frugal.

So, I'll try to fix things. Up to a point. There comes a point, though, when you stop fixing and start shopping.

Maybe you've had a car like that. It's time to give up on ol' faithful. It'd take a miracle to get her going again.

There comes a point when that appliance or tool or car isn't fixable. There's no hope. It's time to throw whatever is broken away.

The exception to that rule is people. Even broken people are NOT throw-aways. Jesus made that abundantly clear in His most stunning "*sign*" - one that we'll see today.

To this point, we have seen Jesus turn water into wine at a wedding, heal a royal official's son and a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years.

We've watched Him feed thousands of people with a few fish and loaves, walk on water, and give a man born blind his eyesight.

Today, by fixing the unfixable, Jesus puts an exclamation mark on His claim to be the completely trustworthy "***Christ, the Son of God.***"

Now, some context for the final "*sign.*"

Jesus, the Good Shepherd... (John 10)

Right after He performed that miracle of giving sight to the man who had born blind, Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd.

He wasn't like the current crop of Jewish "*shepherds.*" (priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees) Those guys were all about getting and keeping power. They were out to "***steal, kill, and destroy.***" - whatever it took to better themselves. (John 10:10)

By contrast, Jesus loved people. He referred to people as His "***sheep.***" He will soon lay down His life for His sheep. He will give them "***abundant life***" (John 10:10) and "***eternal life.***" (John 10:28)

At the end of chapter 10, we come to another confrontation with the ruling Jews, who demanded that He tell them whether He was the Christ, or not.

He told them that He was indeed the Christ and assured them that anyone who believed was eternally secure.

[John 10:28]...and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. [29] My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. [30] I and the Father are one.

That is secure! The believer is held fast by the double strong grip of the Son who is held by the Father.

The Jewish leaders who heard Him say were furious that He had put Himself on the same level as "***the Father.***"

So, **[31] The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.**
- and He eluded their grasp.¹

Jesus then left Jerusalem and went a three-day's journey to the place where John the Baptist had been baptizing.

The Apostle John writes, **[42]...many believed in Him there.** - and then brings us into the action for today with an announcement about a "situation."

Jesus [Finally] Made His Way to Bethany (11:1-16)

Jesus' Good Friend, Sick (11:1-5)

Identities of three friends (vv. 1-3, 5)

[1] Now a certain man was sick: Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. [2] And it was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

These three siblings - Lazarus, Mary, and Martha - were good friends of Jesus.

Martha was the sister who was easily distracted from the most important thing by less important things. (see Luke 10:38-42)

Mary, Martha's sister, was the contemplative. She was content to simply sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him teach while Martha was busy working and serving and being distracted.² (The anointing John mentions took place AFTER today's miracle. See John 12:1-8)

And...we know almost nothing about Lazarus, except that Jesus loved him and his sisters. (v. 5)

¹ Note the repeated rejection of Jesus by the Jews. John 6:66: "**many of His disciples...would no longer walk with Him**"; 7:1: "**the Jews were seeking to kill Him**"; 7:19: "**Why are you seeking to kill Me?**"; 7:30: "**So they were seeking to arrest Him**"; 8:37,40: "**you are seeking to kill Me**"; 8:59: "**they picked up stones to throw at Him**"; 10:31: "**The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him**"; 10:39: "**they were seeking again to arrest Him.**"

The sisters sent a message to Jesus, who was on the other side of the Jordan River, in the region of Perea.

A sickness with a transcendent purpose (vv. 3-4)

[3] So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

They weren't exactly asking for help. But, in sending Jesus this note, they likely expected that Jesus would do something about it.

And Jesus did not jump into action.

[4] But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not meant for death, but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."³

Instead of leaving, Jesus loitered.

Jesus Prepped His Disciples for a Trip to See Lazarus (11:6-16)

Jesus loitered (v. 6)

[6] So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was.

OK. Let's put ourselves in the shoes of the apostles.

They have just left Judea after having had several heated skirmishes with the religious rulers.

The rulers didn't like it that Jesus had healed a man born blind on the Sabbath, and that He claimed to be the Good Shepherd. Twice in recent months they have picked up stones to stone Him to death.

² There are many women who figure prominently into the New Testament named Mary. (1) mother of Jesus; (2) Mary Magdalene (Luke 8); (3) THIS Mary, from the city of Bethany; (4) mother of James the Less (Mark 15:40); (5) wife of Clopas (John 19:25); (6) mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); (7) A woman in Rome whom Paul commended. (Romans 16:6)

³ See John 9:3 where Jesus said much the same thing about the man born blind.

You watch Jesus not respond immediately to Mary's and Martha's news about Lazarus, and you're thinking, "*Good. The Master sees that it wouldn't be smart to go back to Judea now.*"

"Jesus is being savvy. He'll pray for Lazarus. After all, God can hear Jesus' prayers, and we know that He can heal long-distance. Nice to see Him playing it safe, playing it smart this time."

And just when you're thinking those thoughts, Jesus spoke.

Timing is everything (vv. 7-8)

[7] Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let's go to Judea again."

Now you're thinking, "*So...He's not going to play it safe? OK. But if He has been planning on going back to Judea all along, why didn't we go sooner? Now, we've wasted two days, while Lazarus has probably been getting sicker.*"

More than being concerned for Lazarus' health, though, they're concerned for their own safety.

[8] The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone You, and yet You are going there again?" (The unsaid message being, "*...and if we go with You, we're in danger, too!*")

They're confused. They're afraid. Going back to Judea and to Jerusalem makes no sense. They don't understand Jesus' sense of timing.

So, He explained.

Light time / Day time is travel time (vv. 9-10)

[9] Jesus replied, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. [10] But if anyone walks during the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

Bottom line? Jesus wasn't looking for safety in His travels. He was looking to maximize God's glory. And if walking into a hornet's nest would bring maximum glory to God, He was off to the races.

He then fully briefed His disciples about what He was walking them into.

Jesus told His disciples the hard facts (11-16)

Sleep vs sleep (vv. 11-13)

[11] This He said, and after this He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going, so that I may awaken him from sleep." [12] The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will come out of it." [13] Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about actual sleep.

Jesus was speaking about death using the euphemism of sleep.

Today we say that someone who has "*gone on to their reward*" or has "*passed on.*"

But the disciples didn't catch His drift. They figured that if Lazarus was "*asleep,*" they could just let "Doctor Time" heal him and all would be well.

Where death leads (vv. 14-16)

[14] So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus died, [15] and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let's go to him."

If that seems like too much of an abrupt way for Jesus to break the news of Lazarus' death to His disciples - who all no doubt knew Lazarus - there really is no easy way to tell someone of the death of a dear friend or of a family member.

It isn't even easy for us to walk our way through what follows here, because death is a hard theme.

The author of the book of Hebrews wrote about a universal “*fear of death*” that enslaves people. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

We’d rather avoid it, not address it. But the Bible won’t allow that. From Genesis forward, the Bible confronts us with death’s finality, the pain it brings, and its inevitability.

The Bible even says that it is good and healthy for us to consider death. Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, ***[Ecclesiastes 7:2] It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every person, And the living takes it to heart.***

Today, we come to a passage in the Bible that addresses death. We’ll take next steps of faith as we walk through this passage.

Lazarus died. He wasn’t sleeping.

Sleep wouldn’t have presented the disciples with a problem. Sleepy people - even sick people like Lazarus - wake up.

Death is another matter. Death presents a problem beyond fixing.

And Jesus wanted to go back to Judea where Lazarus was - even though he has died. At that, the disciples even more sobered.

Judea had already become a dangerous place for Jesus and for anyone connected to Him.

For them to go back to Judea now was like asking for death. That explains Thomas’ comment: ***[11:16] “Let us also go, so that we may die with him.”***⁴ (You’ll notice that Jesus didn’t even respond.)

With that, they all hit the road to head south to Judea.

Jesus Visited with Martha and Mary (11:17-37)

Intro: Setting the Scene at Bethany (11:17-19)

[17] So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.⁵ [18] Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen stadia away;⁶ [19] and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them about their brother.

Now, let’s think about the timing here.

Let’s assume that it was a three-day trip from Bethany (where Lazarus was) to Perea (where Jesus was).

The sisters sent the message to Jesus that Lazarus was sick on Day 1. Jesus would have received that message on Day 3 or 4. Jesus remained where He was for two days and left Perea for Bethany on Day 5 or 6 or even Day 7.

The three-day journey would have gotten Jesus to Bethany on Day 9 or 10. And, as John tells us, by that time, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days.

Burial would have taken place immediately after death. That’s how it worked in the ancient world to deal with a decaying body and the disease that would follow.

Jesus and the disciples arrived at Lazarus’ house in Bethany where friends had already gathered from Jerusalem to console Mary and Martha.⁷

And, while all were grieving the death of Lazarus, Martha heard that Jesus had arrived.

Mary stayed inside with friends while Martha went out to meet Jesus. (v. 20)

⁴ Ironically, of course, they do not all die, but Jesus does.

⁵ Jewish legend said that the soul hovered over the dead body for three days but gave up hope on the fourth day. Lazarus had been dead long enough for there to be no hope.

⁶ Roughly two miles.

⁷ This has led some Bible scholars to suppose that Mary and Martha and Lazarus were well known to the leadership and were perhaps wealthy or influential.

Jesus and Martha (11:20-27)

Martha's confidence in Jesus (vv. 21-22)

[21] Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."⁸

I have read some who come to this passage and see a barb attached to Martha's comment, as in, *"If you have left Perea when You first received my letter...my brother would not have died."*

I don't think that was what was going on.⁹

I think Martha was simply expressing her confidence in Jesus' ability to have healed Lazarus IF He had gotten there earlier. If He had been present, He could have prevented the death.

Then she added, **[22] "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."**

That was a wonderful statement, but I don't think that Mary was holding out a hope that Jesus was going to "fix" Lazarus' unfixable problem.

She believed that Jesus could bring something redemptive out of this terrible situation.

In the same way that you and I believe that Jesus can bring good out of something bad or tragic or painful, Martha also believed that Jesus could redeem this situation.

Jesus leveraged that confidence to make a bold claim.

Life after this life (vv. 23-24)

[23] Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise from the dead."

Martha's "take" on what Jesus meant was revealing.

[24] Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day."

In other words, *"Right. Just like everyone will be raised at the end of time. Right?"*

To which Jesus responded, *"Well, not exactly..."*

Believing in Jesus (vv. 25-27)

[25] Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, [26a] and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."

Jesus pointed Martha to think beyond the event of resurrection to the One who would bring about resurrection: Himself.

He is the Bread of Life who satisfies as no one else can. He is the Light of the world who outshines any darkness.

He is the Resurrection and the Life without whom there is no resurrection or life. With Him, there is both resurrection and life.

Jesus explicitly asked Martha, **[26b]" Do you believe this?"** Or, *"Do you believe that I am the source and sustainer of life AND that I am the only One who can raise the dead?"*

In light of His claim to be **"the resurrection and the life,"** I think that the answer she gave was filled with more content than before.

[27] She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, and He who comes into the world."¹⁰

⁸ She clearly believed Jesus needed to have been present to have healed Lazarus.

⁹ For one thing, I don't think that Martha was accusing Jesus of being uncaring for not coming sooner. According to my timeline, even if He had left Perea as soon as He had received the note, He would not have arrived before Lazarus died. My

sense is that Jesus delayed leaving for Bethany immediately so that Lazarus would have been dead four days by the time He arrived, past the point of hope for revival.

¹⁰ She believed what John wrote was the point of his writing the book in the first place. (John 20:31)

In John's Gospel, to believe that Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of God*" is "code" for having done the only thing needed to receive the gift of eternal life - believe.

With that, she left Jesus to call her sister Mary to go to Jesus.

Jesus and Mary (11:29-33)

Jesus was still waiting just outside Bethany's city limits, where He had just spoken with Martha.

But when Mary got to where Jesus was, she wasn't alone. She had been followed by the people who had come to her home to grieve Lazarus' death with her and Martha.

When she left the house, they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep for her dead brother, there. So, lots of people heard Mary say exactly to Jesus what Martha had said to Jesus.

[32]... "Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died."

Just like Martha, Mary had tremendous confidence in Jesus. He could have healed Lazarus of his sickness...again IF He had been there.

And Jesus, watching her, lying at His feet, "***was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.***"

Those were real emotions. Jesus was truly, "*the Word made flesh.*" But He wasn't an unfeeling alien. He "*dwelt among us*" and fully entered into humanity, with its physical limitations and its emotional highs and lows.

And He was the only One at Bethany who understood just how wrong Lazarus' death really was. Death was not in God's original plan. Men and women were designed to live, not die.

But then, sin entered the world and made a mess out of everything. A major part of that messiness involves death. It is unnatural. It is a perversion. It is twisted.

And the loss and pain and grief Mary and Martha were going through moved Jesus deeply.

Jesus walked with Mary and with the crowd that had gathered, to the tomb where Lazarus had been laid. As soon as they arrived at the tomb, Jesus lost it.

Jesus and Lazarus (11:34-37)

[34] and He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." [35] Jesus wept.¹¹ [36] So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!"

Everybody could see - maybe they already knew - that Jesus had loved Lazarus.

They even figured that Jesus, who had opened the eyes of the blind, might have been able to fix Lazarus IF he had gotten there before he died. Now, though, it's too late. Now, Lazarus is broken beyond fixing. You don't get healed from a bad case of death.

And with that, our focus shifts to Jesus.

Jesus Raised Lazarus from the Dead! (11:38-44)

Prepping for a Miracle! (11:38-40)

[38] So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

With a crowd of some size looking on, Jesus gave instructions. ***[39a]... "Remove the stone."*** - and everybody wondered if grief had gotten the better of Him.

¹¹ There is more to verse thirty-five than a favorite memory verse (it is, after all, the shortest verse in the Bible)! This gives proof positive that Jesus had a rich

emotional life, that He was moved by the human condition, and that He truly loved people.

The always practical Martha said out loud what everybody else was probably thinking: **[39b]...“Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.”**

Lazarus’ resurrection was the last thing on Martha’s mind. She was grieving, sure. But she was also thinking about the mess they will smell if that stone was rolled away.

Jesus doubled down and said to Martha, **[40]...“Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”**

Finally, the men there did as Jesus instructed them and removed the stone.

With the stone out of the way and with the stench of decaying flesh filling the air,¹² Jesus took action.

The surest sign of dependence is prayer and the best way to bring a God-focus to any event is to pray. So, Jesus prayed.

From Death to Life! (11:41-44)

[41]...Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. [42] But I knew that You always hear Me; nevertheless, because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.”¹³

[43] And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

And out came Lazarus.¹⁴

[44] Out came the man who had died, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

What a sight. Can you imagine being there? Nobody present was expecting it. It must have blown away everyone who was there.

And this, that Jesus demonstrated His power over death, that He reversed death, that was the main thing.

Conclusion: JESUS...

...having power over death, reverses death.

Jesus told His disciples early on that Lazarus’ sickness would result in the glory of God. He told Martha right before the opening of the smelly tomb that she would see the glory of God.

And where is God more glorified than in this miracle, when Jesus is revealed to be the resurrection and the life? He is the One who conquers the grave.

Every miracle we have seen Jesus perform has been spectacular - and increasingly so.

Water into wine at a wedding was a wonderful touch, but not as amazing as the healing of an official’s son and of a lame man, walking on water, feeding five thousand + people, or giving sight to the blind.

But all of those are minor fixups compared to this. This is the irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the completely trustworthy **“Christ, the Son of God.”** By believing in Him we receive the free gift of eternal life.

Then, given this **“sign”** we anticipate Jesus’ resurrection.

...raised Lazarus to show what He will do (Easter’s empty tomb!)

In some ways, what happened here with Lazarus is like a dress rehearsal for Easter Sunday morning. In both cases...

¹² Martha’s fears were justified. Decay would have set in after four days.

¹³ His prayer affirmed His close relationship with His Father. He focused on the point of His action: That those watching would know that the Father had sent Him.

¹⁴ It has often been mentioned, that if Jesus hadn’t specified **“Lazarus”** all of those in the tombs would have come forth.

...there was a cave tomb.
 ...a stone rolled in front of the tomb had to be rolled away.
 ...the raising back to life was not immediate. In Lazarus' case, four days;
 for Jesus, three days and three nights.
 ...there were witnesses. The disciples, the sisters, and the mourners
 saw Lazarus leave the tomb; the soldiers guarding the tomb were
 witnesses to the Lord's resurrection.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He was paving the way for, He was creating expectation for His own resurrection. It [super]naturally followed.

And then, we aren't surprised that He continues to raise the dead.

...give us a picture of what He does for anyone who believes.

On the way to Lazarus' tomb, Jesus took the title "***the Resurrection and the Life***" and went on to do what only God could do.

When the Apostle Paul described what God does when someone believes in Jesus, he used the vocabulary of resurrection.

He wrote that the one who is spiritually dead is [***Colossians 2:12***] ***raised with Him through faith.***¹⁵

He took a man who was broken beyond fixing - he was dead! - and He fixed him. He brought life out of death.

The event we've seen today creates a certain desperation. If I am, spiritually speaking, Lazarus, I know that there is nothing I can do to solve my spiritual deadness problem.

I've got to depend on Jesus to give me life.

So, to anyone here today who, Lazarus-like, is without the life that comes from God, you are in a position of absolute and desperate need.

You are called upon to do - what? What can a person with no life DO?

You are called upon to do nothing - nothing but simply believe in a completely trustworthy Jesus. When you believe, He will raise you to new life.

Finally, the journey of Lazarus paints a realistic and a hopeful picture of life in Jesus.

...gives eternal life to the believer and then begins the process of stench and decay removal.

After Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, his mind was restored. All body functions were operating. His spirit and soul were re-animating his body. He was, in every sense of the word, alive, having been, in every sense of the word, dead.

But, as Martha had predicted, he was smelly. And that's a picture.

I came to faith in Jesus a good many years ago. And I like to think that I'm not as smelly as I once was. But I can be pretty stinky.

I still say things to people that wound. I display rotten attitudes.

The reversal of the process of decay continues as I grow in Jesus. Same for you and for anyone who is on the journey with Jesus that starts with faith.

Our church (any church) is a collection of stinkers who are being renewed to become an aroma of Jesus to those around us.

The Holy Spirit is constantly working in our lives to conform us to the image of Jesus.

As we walk with each other, let's be patient with each other, accepting each other as God, in Christ has accepted us, and urging each other on to be the stunning trophies of grace Jesus saved us to become.

¹⁵ See also Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:6 for the same idea.