

Over the years, *Reader's Digest* has printed many items from the daily lives of ordinary people. Many of these items are quite amusing.

For example, Jennifer Pace wrote in a few years ago to tell about a billboard she passed while driving through Texas. The billboard read: ***“Stand Up and Be Counted for the 2000 Census.”*** The Rosewood Cemetery sponsored the sign.

**Another woman wrote in with a funny excuse she heard from a co-worker.** The man explained his absence from work by saying, ***“I am having my autopsy. But with any luck I will be in tomorrow.”***

**I don't know what kind of medical procedure the man was having, but few people are able to return to work the day after their autopsy.** Lazarus, the man Jesus raised from the dead, came back to work five or six days later, *but there is no indication they did an autopsy on his body.*

**You know the story of Lazarus and his sisters. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were among Jesus' closest friends.** Jesus stayed in their home and ate meals with them. So, when it was obvious that Lazarus was seriously ill and showed no signs of getting better, the sisters sent word to Jesus, ***“Lord, the one you love is sick.”***

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.”*** Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Yet, notice this, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, ***“he stayed where he was two more days.”***

**That one sentence would make a good sermon.** *WHY? Because God's timetable is not our timetable.*

How many times have you prayed that Jesus would come and heal a loved one, and Jesus has lingered seemingly somewhere far off, and all you were left with was silence? **THAT IS WHAT “FAITH” is all about.** Believing in God and God's providence during those times when God seems absent. If we knew that God would heed our every wish, that would not be faith. **That would be something else.**

Jesus lingered where he was. Then he said to his disciples, ***“Let us go back to Judea.”*** The disciples were opposed to this idea. It was already becoming dangerous for Jesus in Judea, but the Master would not be deterred. ***“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep,” Jesus said, “but I am going there to wake him up.”***

**This is the other side of faith.** We will not forever feel forsaken. Christ may linger in another place for a long time, or so it seems. **But his absence is temporary. He has not forgotten us.**

**On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.** The fact that Lazarus was in the tomb for four days may be significant. There were some Jews who believed that you should return to the grave for the purposes of mourning for three days after your loved one's death because the soul of that person was thought to stay around the body for three days, **but after three days, according to this tradition, the soul of the dead person would depart.**

Some of our older members may remember when evangelist Oral Roberts claimed one time that he had raised people from the dead in his ministry. When pressured by the news media he fudged a bit on these ***Four days could have been a statement by Jesus that Lazarus really was dead. That there was no life left in him.***

As scholar R. C. Sproul notes, it is one thing for people to be revived through CPR or other forms of resuscitation. That happens with ever-increasing frequency. It is quite another for a person to be decomposing in the grave for four days and be brought back to life as Lazarus was by the divine command of Jesus.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

***“Lord,”*** Martha said to Jesus, ***“if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*** Then she adds these revealing words, ***“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”*** We see here that Martha was a person of extraordinary faith.

Those of you who remember the story of Mary and Martha in Luke, Mary sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha scurried around doing household chores. Jesus chided Martha and praised Mary. Yet this story in Matthew of Jesus raising their brother Lazarus seems to indicate that Martha probably had the more mature faith.

**Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”** Martha answered, **“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” Martha told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

And 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.” When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When those 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.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said the same thing Martha said, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

When Jesus saw her weeping, and those who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

**JESUS WEPT.** We love that verse, don’t we? It saved many of us when we were young and were asked to recite a Bible verse. “Jesus wept.” This is the shortest verse in the Bible. But it is also one of the most powerful. **Jesus wept. Real tears.** Just like we cry real tears when we are hurting. ***To know that Jesus cares, that he enters our pain and feels our suffering is at the heart of our faith.***

Friends standing around said, **“See how he loved him!”**

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

**Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.** It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. **“Take away the stone,”** he said. Another powerful sentence. **“Take away the stone.”**

Kendall Link, a pastor who frequently preaches at a county jail, claims that the most effective Bible passage he preaches on is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave. **He says the prisoners find hope in “the idea that you don’t have to stay the way you are, the idea that the stone will be rolled away and they can step out into new life . . .”**

**“Take away the stone,”** Jesus said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

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

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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.”

**When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”**

I love the country preacher’s comment about this passage, **“If Jesus hadn’t limited that command to Lazarus, every corpse in the graveyard would have come forth!”**

Jesus called in a loud voice, **“Lazarus, come out!”** And 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.”**

**WHAT AN AMAZING STORY!!** After four days in the tomb, Jesus raised a dead man from the grave.

**But here is the important thing I need to say to you today: DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS YOUR STORY AND MINE?**

We are not one of the bystanders. We are not Mary and Martha. ***We are Lazarus, AND YOU AND I ARE “CALLED TO NEW LIFE.” “Lazarus, come out!” There are some important lessons we need to learn from the story of Lazarus.***

**First of all... this story affirms that RESURRECTION IS FOR ALL.** That's important, of course. You and I have this to look forward to--**the dead in Christ will RISE AGAIN.** *We will live beyond the grave with Christ and with those we have loved.*

Dr. A. L. Jenkins was an emergency-room doctor for 48 years in Knoxville, Tennessee. In this capacity, Dr. Jenkins saw the best and the worst side of the field of medicine. ***But his most vivid memories are of those moments that are medically unexplainable.***

Dr. Jenkins recalls one man who was dead on arrival in the emergency room. It was Dr. Jenkins' policy to attempt resuscitation anyway. After fifteen minutes of CPR, the previously dead man began to show signs of life. The man sat up, looked around him, then said to Dr. Jenkins, ***"Oh, I wish I was still out there! It was beautiful!"***

The man could never explain what he mean, however ***he kept repeating, the place he had been was "so beautiful, so beautiful."***

***Now, many explanations have been given for so-called near-death experiences, including chemical changes in the brain.*** However, it is amazing how these experiences affirm what the Bible teaches us about life beyond the grave. There will come a time when the doctor can do no more for us, but somewhere on the other side, Christ will say, ***"Mike, come out!" "Joe, come out!" "Sally, come out!" This is a story that affirms resurrection.***

**It is also a story THAT GIVES US "HOPE" IN EVERYDAY LIVING.** *It is a word of encouragement for anyone who needs to make a new beginning in life.*

Robert McAfee Brown was a chaplain in World War II. He was on a troop ship with 1,500 Marines on their way home after having served in Japan. To his surprise, he was approached by a group of Marines asking him to lead a Bible study during the voyage.

One day, after the group had studied the passage about the raising of Lazarus, a Marine came to Dr. Brown saying, ***"The story is about me!"*** The young man had gotten into a lot of trouble before going into the service. He could not stand the thought of facing his family. The story of Lazarus gave him hope and courage to face the consequences back home. He had been "turned loose, untied." **Christ rolled away the stone of his life.**

**That's what Christ does for us. He gives us the power to start again, to live again.** He said to Lazarus, ***"Lazarus, come out!"*** Then to those who were present, ***"Take off the grave clothes and let him go."***

**TRUTH IS, THE STORY OF LAZARUS CAN BE OUR STORY.** We, too, can be turned loose, we can be untied. This is particularly good news for someone who is addicted, whether to a chemical substance or to unsavory habits. ***"Lazarus, come out!"*** This is good news for the person who has lived an empty, meaningless life, ***"Lazarus, come out!"*** This is good news for the tired, the hurting, the person at their wit's end. ***"Lazarus, come out!"*** This is good news for all of us, ***"Lazarus, come out!"*** **This can be the beginning of a new life.**

**Some of you will remember the story of a nurse who, before listening to the heart beats of children, would plug the stethoscope into their ears and let them listen to their own hearts.**

One day she tucked the stethoscope into the ears of a four-year-old. Then she placed the disk over his heart.

***"Listen,"*** she said, ***"What do you suppose that is?"*** **Thump, thump, thump.** He drew his eyebrows together in a puzzled line and looked up as if lost in the mystery of the strange tap-tap-tapping deep in his chest. Then his face broke out in a wondrous grin. **"Is that Jesus knocking?"** he asked.

***Well, maybe so. Maybe Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart this day. Maybe Jesus is ordering the door rolled away from your tomb AND CRYING OUT... "Lazarus, come out!"***

The story of the raising of Lazarus ends with these words, ***"Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, PUT THEIR "FAITH" IN HIM."***

**HOW ABOUT YOU?** *Have you really put your faith in him? Do you trust him? Are you willing to turn your life over to his guidance, his direction.*

**THEN LISTEN WHEN HE CRIES... "Lazarus, come out!" Amen.**