

## SMALL GROUP GUIDE

3/11/18 | JOHN 11:1-7, 17-44



### WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Watch this video: [youtube.com/watch?v=F9yIM5G9QM8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=F9yIM5G9QM8)

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

In the prologue to his Gospel, John makes some outrageous claims about Jesus (see John 1:1-18). Near the end of the Gospel, John emphasizes his point this way: "But these [stories] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31).

Throughout the first half of John we read stories in which Jesus makes these claims about himself, and the people must decide for themselves who they think this Jesus really is. The gulf between those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah and those who don't widens. The blind see him, but the sighted do not. Those on the outside of the faith community believe in him, but the religious insiders reject him.

The Lazarus story is the culmination of the first half of John, and it sets the stage for the second half, which leads to the cross. Raising Lazarus is the last of Jesus' seven signs, or miracles, that point to Jesus' identity. Many who witness the raising of Lazarus believe in Jesus, but for the religious leaders it's the last straw. They are now fully committed to killing Jesus.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK? \_\_\_\_\_

Does this story about the raising of Lazarus raise any questions? For example, why does Jesus just stay where he is when he learns that his beloved friend Lazarus is deathly ill? Why does Jesus let him die rather than healing him? Does he do this to prove a point? Do we still talk about God that way today, rationalizing deaths and tragedies as part of some divine plan? Why? Is God really like that? In this story, is Jesus responsible for Lazarus' death, or does he mourn it?

Look for the heartache in this story. Can you imagine Lazarus' suffering and fear as he grows sicker and weaker? Or Mary and Martha's grief as they watch their sick brother die? Can you hear the disappointment and hurt in their words when they confront Jesus? Can you see Jesus' own heartbreak in this story? Can you relate to this kind of pain, fear and suffering?

Look for the new life in this story. Can you imagine the stunned silence when Lazarus comes out of that tomb? Have you ever experienced that sort of shock? When Jesus promises resurrection, is he talking about the distant future? Or is he talking about something more immediate? What? Is there new life available for us now, today, even when everything seems hopeless? How can we know for sure? Is that kind of hope naive when there are so many circumstances in the world that are unimaginably oppressive, heartbreaking, complex, and difficult?

Look also for the unwrapping in this story. Did you catch the moment when Jesus invites the community to unwrap Lazarus, to set him free? Why does Jesus invite the community to both witness and participate in this miracle? Are we invited to do the same? How? Where do we start? And how does all of this lead us to abundant, full, real life right now?

### WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP? \_\_\_\_\_

John wants us to dare to believe that Jesus has come into this world to breathe new life into our deadness, and turn our fear into peace. Jesus calls us out of our tombs to transform our guilt and shame into hope and new beginning. And then we're called to witness this miracle to other people, to unwrap one another from our grave clothes. This week, be intentional about noticing this, in both big and small ways. When are you Lazarus, dead in your heartache? When do you experience new life, and where does it come from? When are you the community that's unwrapping others, and being a part of the hope and new life they seek? Do these things happen more than you realized? Write those experiences in your journal.

### LOOKING FOR MORE? \_\_\_\_\_

Read David Lose's commentary about the raising of Lazarus here: [workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3135](http://workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3135)

How would you answer the questions Lose poses near the end? What is the difference between doing something in order to earn salvation, and doing something because God inspires us to participate? Are there ways that inspired participation can change your community, or even the whole world? Is that what all of this is ultimately about? If so, what are we waiting for?