

**The Yale Divinity School Bible Study
New Canaan, Connecticut
Fall, 2007**

The Gospel of John

VI. Lazarus

Introduction:

In many ways this is the climax of John's Gospel. It is the most spectacular of Jesus' signs, and it is the impetus for growing opposition to Jesus on the part of the religious leaders.

Like other narratives in John's Gospel it provides the opportunity for dialogues (between Jesus and Mary and especially between Jesus and Martha). The dialogues provide the opportunity for Jesus to tutor the sisters in the deeper realities of faith.

It seems that Martha, especially, represents a traditional belief in the resurrection of the dead as a promise for the Last Day. Jesus does not deny this future aspect of resurrection, but even more he insists that he is the resurrection and the life, right in the present.

In some ways Jesus seems very human in this story, but in other ways his reaction is strange (notice how he delays going to comfort the sisters). Some scholars have thought that in John's Gospel Jesus is more nearly superhuman than human, and this is one of those stories that invites us to think about that question.

Questions for Reading:

Is there a progressive understanding on Martha's part in her dialogue with Jesus?

What does this gospel mean when it talks about the glory of God?

What is the role of "the Jews" in this story? Are they presented more sympathetically here than in the story of the man born blind, for example?

Questions for Reflection:

Do Mary and Martha represent two different responses to Jesus? If so how do they differ?

In this passage, Jesus displays considerable emotion. How does that affect your understanding of his character in this gospel?

What finally does “resurrection” mean in the eyes of John? Is it primarily a future hope or a contemporary experience?

For further study:

Basic:

Francis J., Moloney, “The Faith of Martha and Mary: A Narrative Approach to John 11,17-40,” *Biblica* 75 (1994) 471-93

More challenging:

William Wuellner, “Putting Life Back into the Lazarus Story and Its Reading: The Narrative Rhetoric of John 11 as the Narration of Faith,” *Semeia* 53 (1991) 113–132.