

Lent Five

Read

[John 11:1–45](#)

Text and Land

This week's Gospel takes us out of Jerusalem and to the nearby village of Bethany, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. These days the village is known as 'al-Eizariya' (the place of Lazarus).

Today, al-Eizariya' is a Palestinian town of around 17,000 people. In the time of Jesus it was probably a small village with just a few hundred people.

Today, al-Eizariya' is cut off from Jerusalem by the 8m high 'Separation Wall' that Israel has erected to assert its definition of metropolitan Jerusalem. That wall isolates the people of al-Eizariya' from their cultural, economic, medical and religious connections in Jerusalem.

In Jesus' day the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus provided a 'safe house' within easy walking distance of Jerusalem. These days Jesus would need to take a circuitous route and navigate an Israeli military checkpoint before gaining access to the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

These three siblings also offer a different model of discipleship. They did not leave family and home to follow Jesus. Instead, they put their home at the service of Jesus and his followers. This Judean village family may represent a segment of the earliest Jesus movement that we are inclined to overlook. Regular people with family commitments can also be full participants in the kingdom of God.

In this passage Jesus hears of Lazarus' illness but decides to remain in the north. Only after a delay of some days does he decide to head south to Bethany. By the time Jesus arrives Lazarus is dead, but Jesus will then raise him back to life. For the local Christians of Palestine, the raising of Lazarus is a prophetic act that foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus. For this reason, the traditional Palm Sunday procession began at the tomb of Lazarus in al-Eizariya'. When that can happen once more then a new 'Lazarus moment' will have happened in the land of the Holy One.

Questions for Discussion

- On Passion Sunday many churches will cover ornate or celebratory art, often including crosses, with purple cloths. What are your personal and family customs for Holy Week and Easter? Does the story of Jesus raising Lazarus play a part in those traditions?
- The three unmarried adult siblings that constituted this household of Jesus followers in the first century do not fit our usual model for 'family'. How is your intimate circle configured? Are our churches too attached to traditional models of the nuclear family to welcome people with different family structures?
- What area of your life most needs renewal and resurrection by the living Jesus?

Prayer

Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' (John 11.44b)

"To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." – Nelson Mandela

God bless me with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that I may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

Amen. (Adapted from A Franciscan Blessing)

