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The Binding of Isaac. The raising of Lazarus.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis chapter 22. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and rose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

Then Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son.

And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father.

And he said, Here I am my son. He said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering my son. They went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, Here I am. He said, Do not lay your hand on the boy nor do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place.

The Lord will provide. As it is said to this day on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, By myself I have sworn declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son.

I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Because you have obeyed my voice. So Abraham returned to his young men and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Now after these things it was told to Abraham, behold, Milcah also has born children to your brother Nahor, Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidalath and Bethuel. Bethuel fathered Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother.

Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Ruma, bore Teba, Geham, Tehash and Marakah. The story of Genesis chapter 22, the binding of Isaac, is perhaps one of the most poignant yet pregnant stories of the Old Testament. It's an event that is profoundly troubling that has inspired some of the deepest ethical reflection, a lot of outrage and scandal from various people.

How can God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? How can Abraham be praised for seemingly going through to the extent that he does with God's command? And these are questions that we might ponder as we go through this chapter. The chapter begins with the statement, After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, Here I am. He said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

In chapter 12, when Abraham is first called, we read, Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go

from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. The similarity should be immediately noticeable. God sends Abraham forth from the land of Ur of Chaldees to a land that he will show him, and he sends Abraham forth to a mountain that he will show him.

In the first case, he's called to sacrifice his past, his connection with his father's house, his land, his kindred. And in the second case, he's asked to surrender his future, the son that all his hopes and legacy depends upon. God is testing Abraham in both of these cases.

According to traditional Jewish numbering, the first account is the first test of ten that Abraham receives, and the final account is the final of the ten tests that Abraham receives. These are events that define Abraham's life, both the sacrifice of his past and the sacrifice of his future. We've already noted in chapter 21 that there are a great many similarities between the sending out of Ishmael and the seeming sacrifice of Isaac.

One lad parallels the other. Their identities are entwined. There are parallels with the Exodus narrative and connections with the Exodus narrative in both occasions, and together they might relate to the ritual of the Day of Atonement.

When we're reading these stories, then, we're dealing with something that has to do with the deep structure of Scripture. And there are echoes and resonances throughout the Old Testament that connect to these events. And as we read the story of the cross, we're reading a story that has all sorts of resonances with the events that we see in this chapter, in the story of Abraham and Isaac, the one sacrificing his son.

The story hinges in many ways upon the key expression, the key term that plays throughout the story. Hineni, the Here I am answer that is given on a number of occasions. God calls to Abraham and Abraham's response is, Here I am.

Then we see Isaac speaking to Abraham, his father, and his father answers, Here I am. And then the angel of the Lord calls from heaven and says, Abraham, Abraham, and Abraham says, Here I am. The economy of the brush strokes in the narrative of this account add considerably to its power.

We read the conversation between Abraham and Isaac, for instance. Isaac speaks to his father, My father, and he said, Here I am, my son. He said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham said, God will provide for himself a lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

So they went both of them together. And that silence that follows is one of the most powerful and poignant aspects of the story. The son seems to know what's going on.

He seems to have a sense that something's amiss. There is one thing that they need that they do not have. All the other things that will enable them to burn up and prepare the

sacrifice are there, except the sacrifice itself.

And he realizes, presumably, that his father knows something that he does not. His father is bearing a deep burden that he is not yet privy to. And the response of Abraham is again to make known his presence to his son.

Very interesting contrast with the story of Hagar. Hagar sees her son about to die and distances herself from him, going off at a bow shot so that she will not have to see him die. But Abraham's response to his son is to say, here I am.

Just as he says to God later on, there's no departure from his son or emotional distancing. He's present with his son, even as he's bringing him to the point of sacrifice. A very powerful part of the story.

The emotional power of the narrative is also underlined with the threefold repetition at the original command. Take now your son, the first description. Your only son, Isaac, the second description.

Whom you love. Third description. And each one of these is an accumulation of the weight of the action that Abraham is being called to do.

It would seem that this is the one thing that he could never sacrifice. In the earlier part of the story, in Genesis chapter 12, there is a threefold repetition of him having to leave behind his father's house, his kindred, his land. But this is a far more weighty threefold intensified statement.

We should consider what has happened in the story to this point. In the first few chapters of Abraham's narrative, it would seem that Lot was the heir apparent. He was the son of Abraham's brother, the one who had died, and he would be the one that would continue Abraham's name.

But yet, Lot leaves him, divides from him in chapter 13. In chapter 14, even though he's rescued by Abraham, he goes off his own way. In chapter 19, he ends up living in a cave in the mountains and there's no hope for Lot at that point really.

We see then Ishmael has gone. In chapter 16, Ishmael comes on the scene, the child of Hagar. And in chapter 21, he has to be cast out.

Eliezer is not going to be the one who inherits. He's just a man from the house, a home-born slave, as we see in chapter 15. Isaac, his only son, that is the one, however, that God calls for him to sacrifice.

And the request is devastating for this reason. His whole narrative to this point has been one lost hope after another, leading to this great promised son. All his expectations and hopes and everything else is resting upon this child.

Think about what else he represents. He is the promised child given to Sarah. How could Abraham ever relate to his wife again after this? How could he relate to the Lord if the Lord required from him this son that he has given? Abraham has negotiated or interacted with God on earlier occasions, such as in chapter 18.

In chapter 18, God talks to Abraham concerning what he's about to do and Abraham at that point intercedes and deliberates with God. But here in this chapter, there seems to be a more absolute command. He has to obey this.

He has to go through with it. God doesn't seem to be setting things up for a negotiation and a discussion. And for Abraham to go through with this, there needs to be an absolute sense of loyalty to God.

But not just loyalty to God. This text sets up the emotional weight of what's taking place. God is not unmindful of the weight that he's putting upon Abraham.

And the subtlety and the attention with which the emotional dimensions of the event are described suggests that it's important. It's important that Abraham is able to say, Here I am to his son and truly mean it. That he's not forsaken his son.

He's not just closing himself off to his son. But yet to do that, he has to have an absolute confidence in God's promise, in God's commitment, in God's goodness. And at many times we may find ourselves in the darkness of a decision in wrestling through some issues, just not knowing how can God be good and yet lay this burden upon us? Or how can God be true and yet this thing or this statement also be true? And that wrestling with God in the darkness is something where we find Abraham really providing a pattern for us to follow.

Within the New Testament in the book of Hebrews, we are told that Abraham was confident that God would even raise Isaac up from the dead. He had received Isaac as if he were from the dead. And now he hopes that whatever he does with his son, that God will fulfill his promise whatever it takes.

God had promised that in Isaac your seed will be called. And so he could account that God was able to raise him up even from the dead because he had received Isaac as if he were from the dead in the first place. Now, that's one suggestion of how to read the text.

He expects that God is telling him to go through with the action and as he goes through with it, God will be faithful to his promise even to that uttermost position. God was symbolized in that flaming torch and furnace that went through the pieces. And the promise was there that God would be cut off, that God would be cut up into pieces in the same way if he did not keep his covenant.

And so he has to fulfill what he has promised to Abraham. And even if that requires the raising of Isaac from the dead, God will do it. And so Abraham's confidence is one that

occurs even in the midst of deep blindness.

He does not know where God is leading. He cannot see the way he will go. He cannot see a route through this.

But he's confident in God's provision and he answers to his son, My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering. There may be a sort of double entendre here that what may be provided for the burnt offering is the son himself. My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

That it's the son that's going to be provided. And he's not just addressing the son, but rather it is the son who will be the provision that God gives. As we read this story alongside other stories in scripture, I think we can see further things taking place.

The story of the Shunammite woman, for instance, in 2nd Kings chapter 4 involves a woman being given a child in her old age according to the messenger of God that visits her. And there are so many linguistic and other parallels with the story of the promise of the birth of Isaac. But then the child dies.

And the woman saddles her donkey, goes out early in the morning, sees the mountain of Faroth, lays the wood, the staff, upon the child. And then later on there is the prophet and the child being joined together as the prophet lies down on the child in a way that creates some connection between the two. And the woman receives her child back.

She was given the child by promise and when the child is lost she insists that God give the child back. And that is something that I think will help us to read this chapter, to understand that there is a reason, a justice by which Abraham and Sarah could appeal for their child back, could appeal for Isaac to be restored to them, even if he were killed. At this point in the story, it's likely that Isaac is in his 30s.

He's going along with it. He's not just someone who is being forced to do this. He's not going to be tied to that altar without his own will being involved.

He submits. He is a son who follows with his father, who does not rebel against his father's call. And this is one of the powerful aspects of the story and helps us to understand what we see in the New Testament.

The relationship between the father and the son in the death of Christ. Christ is the one who willingly accepts the will of his father. He struggles with it, the cup that's given to him, yet declares, yet not my will but yours be done.

And that submission to the will of his father, the loyalty, the trusting that God will raise him up, that God is faithful, even at the point of deepest darkness and death when God seems to come as an enemy, that is the confidence that we see in the story of Abraham and Isaac and the confidence that we see in the story of Jesus Christ. Abraham's

confidence that God will provide is something that leads to the naming of the place later on when God does in fact provide. A ram caught in the thicket by its horns.

He goes and takes the ram, offers it as a burnt offering instead of his son. And here I think that God's intervention should not be read as a statement that human sacrifice is wrong. That's how many people read it, but that's not actually what follows.

God says, now I know that you fear me. He doesn't say, you should never have done this. I would never have required this of you.

Rather, this is a movement into a deeper relationship between Abraham and God. Abraham has related to God as a friend. He has related to God in hospitality, for instance, by his faithfulness in building up the name of others, in elevating the name of God, in establishing sites of worship in the land.

But now there is something here that goes further. He enters into a greater fearing of God, an awe and a reverence of God, seen in his submission to God's will, even in the deepest darkness, even when he does not know where it will lead him. And this is part of what I think is emerging through Abraham's test.

This is the result that we will see at the end. And God sees at this point. God provides.

Maybe remembering Hagar at this point and the way that she speaks of God in chapter 16 would be helpful. This mount is a significant place. Why this particular mount? I believe because it's the temple mount.

It's the mount upon which all sacrifices will occur. Later on in 2nd Chronicles 3 verse 1, Solomon builds the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. So this is a place where many things had occurred.

It's the place where Abraham sacrificed Isaac. It's the place where the angel of God stayed his hand of judgment in his judgment after the census of David. It's a significant site then and it is the foundation of the sacrificial system more generally.

Part of its deeper meaning. What is ultimately being sacrificed at this site? Not just animals. What's being sacrificed is the son.

The future, the identity, the people of Israel are sacrificing themselves. And the sacrificing of the firstborn son, the only son, the only begotten son, is something that is connected with the event of the exodus as well. As there is the setting apart of the firstborn through that.

And so all these deep themes of Israel's worship of its temple are found present in this event. This is the event that provides the source of these later systems. And every one

of these later sacrifices draws our attention back to that sacrifice at the past.

Now it also draws our attention forward to the sacrifice of the future. If it is the father Abraham sacrificing his only begotten son, that the whole sacrificial system looks back to, it is the sacrifice of Christ as the son of the father that is everything that it looks forward to. Caught between these two great covenantal events, the sacrificial system takes its significance and meaning.

Many people read this story as if it were just sacrifice narrowly averted. But something more is taking place here. There is a substitution of Aram, but there is a genuine sacrifice occurring here.

The blessing that comes afterwards is a blessing that amplifies the previous blessings. It's a statement that because Abraham has obeyed God's voice, he has heard and obeyed and submitted to the word of the Lord. He has feared the Lord.

That God has claimed him on a deeper level. In this sacrifice of his son, Abraham is giving himself to God in a new way. It's a child that is being given again to God after he has been given in the first place.

And maybe an example of this can be seen in the story of Samuel. The child that is received by grace as the womb is opened and then the child that is given to God. And Isaac is given to God here.

Abraham is dedicating as it were in this sacrifice all of his offspring to God. God claims Abraham's son for his own. In the story of the exodus, we're told that Israel is my firstborn son.

That statement that God makes concerning Israel, I think is founded in part upon what takes place here. Israel is God's firstborn son as Abraham gave up his son to God. God's name, God's claim is placed upon this child above Abraham's own.

There's a way in which this child now bears the name of God in a way that he did not before. It's a new sense of that child's identity. He's ascended to God.

And God takes Israel as his inheritance. They are his people. They belong to him.

They have been dedicated to him. Not merely by claiming them for himself, but by Abraham's willing giving up of his son. This then is an absolutely foundational event for all that follows.

And ultimately all sacrifice is human sacrifice. We offer up ourselves in worship. We offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, singular, all together, bringing ourselves together in the body of Christ.

And that is what Paul talks about in Romans chapter 12. It's founded upon the offering of

Christ and then it looks back to the offering of Isaac. These stories are all bound together in a deep logic of sacrifice that we should never forget.

That sacrifice is always ultimately human sacrifice. We belong to God. We offer ourselves up to God, whether in symbols or whether in other ways, in baptism for instance, our bodies are sacrificed to God.

They're washed as the sacrifices were washed. Our members and our limbs and organs, like sacrifices cut up, they belong to God now. We are set apart as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

As we descend from Mount Moriah with Abraham and his son, we should come away from it with a profound realization of what the fear of the Lord means. Of what the logic of sacrifice points towards. And ultimately of what occurs in Christ.

Something to meditate upon. This chapter ends with Abraham receiving the news of children being born to Nahor, his brother, by Milcah. Milcah was the daughter of the dead brother Haran.

And also some children by the concubine. And four children by the concubine, eight children by his wife. We can see this pattern elsewhere in Genesis, where the wife has twice as many children as the concubine.

Altogether this makes 12 children of Nahor. What are we to make of this? Abraham will one day have 12 tribes descending from him. Ishmael will be the father of 12 princes.

What are we to make of the fact that Nahor receives 12 offspring a generation before Abraham's line does? John chapter 11 verses 1 to 44. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

So the sister sent to him saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, this illness does not lead to death, for it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of Man may be glorified through it. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, Let us go to Judea again. The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you and are you going there again? Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him. The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.

Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.

So Thomas called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go that we may die with him. Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Mary and Marth to console them concerning their brother.

So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.

Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? She said to him, yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God, who is coming into the world.

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, the teacher is here and is calling for you. And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how he loved him.

But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away the stone.

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days. Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

I knew that you always hear me. But I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. The raising of Lazarus in John chapter 11 is a pivotal event within John's Gospel.

It completes the cycle of seven signs that compose the book of signs, which is what the first half of John's Gospel has often been called. It's also an event that sets things in motion for the second half of the book, the book of glory, that is concerned with Christ's death and resurrection. Putting those things together, it could be seen as the fulcrum upon which the book turns.

Recognising the importance of this chapter, I think, will help us to understand some of the themes that are at play within it. Some scholars have even speculated that Lazarus is the author of the Gospel. He is the disciple loved by Christ, the one who has this peculiar association with him.

This is a position put forward by Richard Borkham, among others. As in the rest of the Gospel, it's important to consider the space that is given to particular elements within the story. In other signs of Christ, we see a lot of attention given to subsequent conversations.

The miracle or the sign sets the scene for a conversation that follows, that reflects upon its deeper meaning and intent. Here we see a lot of attention given to the events preceding the sign, and it's worth paying attention to why they are in there in the first place. We begin by being introduced to the characters.

Mary is introduced to us according to the action that she performs in the chapter that follows. This maybe suggests that John assumes a certain knowledge of the narrative and the tales that compose it beforehand. Presumably his readers are familiar with one of the synoptic Gospels, or they have some acquaintance with the traditions and the stories associated with various witnesses, without actually having heard them all strung together in a single narrative.

Mary then is a known character already, and she is introduced to us as one who is related to Lazarus at this point. Another thing to notice is the attention given to orders of days. There is a first day that Jesus is told about the sickness of Lazarus, then there's a two-day waiting period, then there's four days that he has been in the tomb.

Is this suggesting a week pattern? It might be. And as we've seen in John chapter 1 and 2, John can be very attentive to sequences of days and what is revealed through them. Here Jesus speaks of being glorified through the raising of Lazarus, and that language

has a lot of weight in John's Gospel more generally.

It's language that is typically associated with Christ's own death and resurrection. In some way the raising of Lazarus is entwined with Jesus' own resurrection that will happen in chapters that follow. Also worth noting that Jesus speaks of glorification in the context of his first sign, and now this is the final sign.

Putting those together I think helps us to see something of what's taking place. Jesus also talks about night and light, the importance of walking in the light. Jesus is the one who walks in the light of God's will.

He is, as he has described himself in a previous chapter, the light of the world. And death and sleep correspond with the situation of night. We sleep in the night and death corresponds with the night.

Christ is the one who brings the light to which we rise. As we often see within the Bible, literary structures and parallels can help us to understand deeper meanings. In John chapter 11 we can see the way that two encounters are paralleled with each other.

Jesus first meets Martha and then he meets with Mary. Both Mary and Martha present Jesus with a similar challenge. Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.

And the similarity invites us to reflect both upon the similarities between the two encounters and upon the differences. The difference that really stands out is what Martha says after that statement. Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.

The later encounter with Mary doesn't include that. And so there's a sort of contrast between the faith that Martha exhibits and the limited faith that Mary exhibits. In the Gospel of Luke we have a far more negative portrayal of Martha as the one who's busied with the work of the house and fails to pay attention to the one who is visiting, Christ himself.

Whereas Mary is the one who sits at Christ's feet. Once again here we see Mary associated with Christ's feet. She throws herself at his feet and later on in the chapter that follows she anoints his feet.

And so there's a particular attachment that Mary has to Christ. And it's a very personal attachment but yet perhaps it's more easily wounded as a result of that. She feels maybe that her love for Christ has been wounded or betrayed by his failure to come when he was called.

And in the case of Martha, Martha being maybe a more practical and down-to-earth person, she's able to hold on to some sense of faith and hope even in this position of

tragedy. She's not so easily wounded as her sister is. Maybe we're supposed to think of it in that way and see another aspect of these personalities.

Personalities that may very much resemble personalities that we know, that we might have ourselves. And it's important to consider the way that there are paradigmatic encounters of faith and people who are believers or who fail to believe at certain points with Christ throughout the Gospel of John. Remember John's Gospel is written so that we might believe and that believing we might have life.

And so throughout the Gospel there are examples of people who respond to Christ well, examples of people who fail to respond to Christ well. And these personal encounters are ones that provide models for us. Note again that John gives so much attention to individual encounters with Christ, far more so than any of the synoptic Gospels.

John has Jesus meeting with people like Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the interactions with the man in chapter 5 and chapter 9 who are paradigmatic characters who are thrown out by the Jews or who are healed and delivered in particular ways. We can think about the encounters with Mary and Martha here, the relationship between Christ and the disciple he loved, the relationship between Christ and characters like Peter. All of these one-to-one relationships provide models for us to understand our faith in relationship to Christ, Thomas being another great example.

On many occasions in the Gospels, Jesus turns up late. Jesus' delay, the fact that he doesn't turn up when people first call for him, is an important part of stories such as the storms upon the sea and events such as this with the raising of Lazarus. Jesus delays.

But yet that delay is not out of a failure of his love for people. Within the Gospel, Jesus' love for his disciples, his love for his friend, his love for Lazarus are precipitating forces for all of the plot. As we'll see later on, it's because of his raising of his friend Lazarus that the Jews instigate the plot that will finally lead to his death.

Jesus lays down his life for his friend out of love. But yet that love is not one that leads to immediate response to every petition that's sent to him. Rather, that love can cause him to delay so that when he answers, the glory of God might be seen more clearly.

How do we experience Christ's delay in response to our requests? That's one of the questions that I think that John wants us to ponder. Mary and Martha here then are characterized in juxtaposition and in relationship to each other. Mary comes surrounded by the Jews, Jews who are trying to bring comfort, but Jews who also fail to believe in Christ.

Jesus is clearly moved deeply in his interaction with Mary. He expresses his love and his tears for his friend Lazarus. But yet that response of the unbelievers around Mary, that maybe he could have raised Lazarus, his friend, if he so cared about him, causes him to

be deeply moved, not just in a sense of love for his friend, but in grief and anger, perhaps also at the unbelief that surrounds her.

In the case of Martha, he seems to elicit and encourage her resurrection faith. He begins by stating that her brother will rise in the resurrection. For Martha, this is a reference to the more general Christian and Jewish hope in the final resurrection of the dead, and she affirms it on that level.

But yet Christ comes in response to her with one of the most powerful statements of the gospel, perhaps the pivotal statement of the gospel. I am the resurrection and the life. First of all, this is using the great language of divine identity.

I am. But beyond that, it's stating that Christ is the reality of future resurrection, in person, present at that moment in time. That the resurrection isn't just a generic truth.

It's not just a truth that some event will befall. It's a personal reality and it's present in Jesus Christ. He is resurrection personified.

He is the one who has life within himself. He is the one whose word will raise the dead and give life to those in the tombs. And so when Christ comes to this situation, he comes bringing life and the fullness of life with him.

As he comes to the tomb, then he again is presented with Martha's limited faith. She observes that there's going to be an odor. He's been dead for four days.

Jesus doesn't rebuke her for her weak faith, but encourages her to trust him and that as she trusts him, she will see the glory of God. Now, earlier on in the gospel, we've been told that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will rise. And Jesus speaks into that situation, into that tomb, and calls Lazarus to come forth.

Man comes with his hands and feet bound with linen strips, his face wrapped with a cloth, and he's called to be unbound and to be sent on his way. Jesus is grieved by the assault of death and the disbelief of people in the face of it. He comes as the resurrection and the life.

He calls someone from the grave in anticipation of the final resurrection. And the resemblance between the description of Lazarus and the later description of Christ is important to note here. Christ is giving here an anticipation of his own resurrection.

Once again, we see, as with a number of the other signs, it's the word of Christ that is the means of salvation and deliverance. And Christ speaks into that situation. And as those people who hear his word, we receive life.

A question to meditate upon. Both Jesus' first sign and his final sign involve a response to the request of a woman who loves him. First, seemingly rebuffed or not answered, and

then answered in response to a persistent faith.

What are some of the lessons that we can learn about faith and its relationship with prayer in this chapter?