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NOT JUST WHO, BUT WHAT

Once again, another long Gospel reading.

- But that's one of the gifts that John give us:
  - conversations with lots of detail;
  - tons of information about the place and the people in that time.

We get these long texts this time of year to show us why the opposition wanted JESUS out of the way—dead, actually.

- JESUS' growing support was a threat to their power.
- These things lead us to the cross and the crucifixion.

These passages can also move us past the cross and toward the possibilities that come in the resurrection.

- Yet, it is easy to miss those possibilities because of think that it is enough to know who JESUS is.
- Still, there is so much more that a relationship with JESUS can bring when we focus, not just on who JESUS is,
  - but also, on what makes our relationship with HIM so important.

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This was the problem of Martha, Mary, the disciples, and the Jews.

- Martha and Mary send for JESUS when their brother, Lazarus, is sick.
  - By the time JESUS arrives, Lazarus is dead.
- They knew of JESUS' miraculous healings and believed that JESUS could save their brother.
- Both say the same things to JESUS: *"LORD, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*
- The Jews also recognize HIS power and potential:
  - *"Could not HE who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"*

All of them recognize the power of JESUS, but believe it is limited to healing the living.

- They think they know who HE is, but they don't understand what it is that HE has to offer. Even the disciples haven't figured it out.

- When JESUS says HE is going to Bethany, not far from Jerusalem where JESUS had nearly been killed, Thomas speaks for the others and says, *"Let us also go, that we may die with HIM."*
  - They, too, think the power of JESUS is limited.
- They've been with HIM for three years.
- They've heard HIS teachings and seen HIS miracles.
  - They are pretty sure they know who HE is, but they, too, don't really know what JESUS can do.

JESUS tries to tell them, but even they don't understand just what HE has to offer

- *"I am the RESURRECTION and the LIFE. The one who believes in ME will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."*
- Martha's words reflect the limited perspective of so many: *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."*
  - For Martha, for the Jews, it seems that JESUS has little to offer between now and the end of time.
    - At least for the living, anyway.

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In 1991, at the Billy Graham crusade in Seattle, Shirley Lansing talked about the death of her son.

- “I come with a story about my son, John Kendall Morgan, Warrant Officer One, United States Army, serving in Operation Desert Storm, she said.
  - Shirley told the crowd that her son, John, had committed his life to JESUS at an early age.
    - “At the time,” she said, “it didn’t seem terribly important, but it was.
    - “A few weeks ago,” Shirley continued, “two officers came to our door...to inform us that our son had been killed in action when his helicopter was shot down by hostile Iraqi fire.”
- The most moving moment of Shirley’s witness came when she said, “I speak to you only from my heart...only GOD can give me the strength to stand here before you and say these words. But they are so important.
  - “Each of you has the decision to make that my son made.
  - “And this is the time when you have a choice, and we never know how long we’ll have to make that decision.”

Three weeks before John

- Three weeks before John Morgan was killed in action half-a-world from home, he wrote two letters to his family, “just in case.”
- Shirley and her family gathered together and read the letters after they received word John’s death.
  - The words at end of his letters reassured the family:
    - “In case you have to open this, please don’t worry. I am all right...Now I know something you don’t know—what heaven is like!”

Comforting words when a loved one leaves us through death.

- But, again, too many believe this is all JESUS has to offer us.

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The disciples, too, had missed the point of JESUS’ teachings.

- Even when JESUS says, “*Our friend, Lazarus, has fallen asleep,*” they take JESUS literally and think he is in a healing sleep.
- And when JESUS proposes going to Lazarus, they can see no future beyond death with JESUS.
- So, JESUS says to them, “*I’m glad I was not there, so that you may believe.*”
  - JESUS wants them to know what HE can do.
    - But later, even having raised Lazarus to life doesn’t seem to help them, so that when JESUS is arrested, they flee.

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Today, many of us who believe in JESUS still miss the possibility of what life with JESUS can be.

- Many today believe that JESUS is the SAVIOR and trust that at the end of time, JESUS will return to call us back to life.
- Indeed, this is a promise that can provide promise and hope at the end of life in this world.
  - But the possibility of what JESUS can do in each life every day, sadly, is not understood or fully claimed.

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I heard a story of a woman who had been raised Roman Catholic.

- She was also emotionally abused growing up.
- She was forced to marry the only Roman Catholic boy in town.
  - But the next day they crossed the county line and got a divorce—a great sin in the Catholic church.

- She later married and had children, but the guilt she felt and the impact of the abuse she had endured growing up led to a nervous breakdown.
    - She started seeing a psychiatrist and taken antidepressant medication.
  - The family found a Baptist congregation and began attending, but the service and the pastor were so different that the woman didn't feel comfortable there.
  - One day, however, the family went to a large Lutheran church in the community.
    - On their first day attending, the pastor gave a sermon on grace, on GOD'S unconditionally love and acceptance.
    - After coming out of church, the woman smiled and said to her family, "I no longer need a psychiatrist or medication."
      - "Now I have grace."
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The raising of Lazarus back to life is not just about Lazarus.

- JESUS restores Martha and Mary to the life they had before Lazarus' death.
- In the same way, the death of JESUS on the cross removes the guilt and burden of our sin so that we are restored to the life we had before sin put to death our identity.

So many live with the shame of things done in the past, things they believe they can never put behind them, and that GOD can never forgive.

- It is as though the actions of the past have ended life for them,
  - at the very least they wanted or hoped for,
  - and at most, the life that GOD wanted for them.

*"Everyone who lives in ME and believes in ME will never die."*

- Sin, our own and the sin of others, leads to death:
  - death of who we want to be in CHRIST,
  - and death of what we can become in CHRIST.
- JESUS has the power to raise us back to the life GOD wants for us.

JESUS' power is not limited.

- It is the power to raise the dead,
  - even those who feel dead in this life.

JESUS has the power to bring new life to that which has died.

- It is not just something for the end of time.
- It is not just something for when we reach the end of our life.
- It is GOD'S grace and love that can change a person's life.
- It is not just in the future; it is now.
- It is who JESUS is.
- And it is what JESUS does.