

Have you ever heard of the woman **Marjorie McCall**? Marjorie McCall lived in Lurgan in the early 18th Century and is famous for being the woman who lived once but was buried twice. Legend has it that she took ill and, everyone assumed she died from that illness and was buried. (Legend has it that her husband was a doctor!)

At that time there was an unsavoury trend where resurrectionists (grave robbers) would come and dig up a recently deceased body, they would claim the valuables for themselves and deliver the corpse to one of the many private medical schools for doctors to practice and learn about anatomy.

You can imagine the surprise then when **Marjorie McCall** was exhumed only for her to wake up and the grave robbers to run off in terror. You can also imagine the shock of her husband when she arrived home for supper that evening.

Her gravestone is still in the Shankill cemetery in Lurgan with the inscription ***Marjorie McCall; lived once, buried twice.***

Of course, Marjorie wasn't the first person to live once and be buried twice. Lazarus certainly lays claim to that title as well.

Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus along with his sisters Martha and Mary. They are the same sisters who got themselves into a tangle when Jesus called for tea, Martha busy and fussing in the kitchen while Mary sat and listened to Jesus. This is the same Mary who came and anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume.

It seems strange then that despite such a close friendship that when Jesus received word from the sisters that Lazarus was ill (and we know from the story he was gravely ill) that Jesus instead of going to see them, stayed where he was for two days before going to them.

Now, there is a real question as to what difference Jesus going straight away would have made in the story. We know that when Jesus finally arrived at Lazarus' tomb, he had been dead for two days. We believe it took a day for the message to reach Jesus in the first place, he stayed two days and then a day for him to travel. This means Lazarus must have died shortly after the messenger set out.

Nevertheless, both Mary and Martha, in their grief and possibly even their disappointment that Jesus hadn't come right away both said, ***'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'*** (John 11:21)

This is a sentiment most of us can identify with. How many times have we prayed, how many times have we sent for Jesus, and it seems as though he either just didn't come, or he came too late and so instead of the miracle we hoped for we are left looking for comfort. We wanted a loved one to be made well, we wanted something to have a positive outcome, but instead of rejoicing in that, we are left being comforted in our grief – and is it not true that we can harbour a little resentment because of that?

We may be like Martha, holding on to some form of belief, hope, ***I know even now God will give you what you ask***, but actually that is tinged with a fair slice of, if not resentment, then

certainly a shaken faith or doubt about Jesus and we see all of this in how the next few minutes pan out.

Jesus response to Martha's lament that Jesus hadn't been there when he was needed was to say that Lazarus will rise again.

Now, this is one of those times when we have to try and separate ourselves from knowing the outcome of this story because it is so famous, from what it would have been like for Martha. This would have been a bit like me going to a family where there was a death and talking about the resurrection. No-one would expect me to be talking about bringing someone back to life and cancelling the funeral. They would automatically know that I was talking about the final resurrection when Jesus returns.

This is the same for Martha. ***I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*** (John 11:24)

This is where we get to the incredibly important part of this story. You see Martha is expressing a hope for something more. She is holding onto the hope that this is not the end for Lazarus, but she doesn't quite know what to base that hope on, other than it is something she has been taught.

We see this all the time. People will constantly talk about a loved one going to a better place, they will talk about seeing them again at some point. They talk about an afterlife, but they don't really know what to base that hope on. Sometimes it's as though there is this automatic passing from life to death, to some kind of heaven, or spirit world – but how that happens or why that happens, that's a question people find really hard to answer.

This is where Jesus is incredibly clear. ***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. Do you believe this?*** (John 11: 25-26)

Jesus was saying to Marha, don't believe in a resurrection, don't believe in an afterlife, believe in me, because I am those things. I am life, I am resurrection. This hope you have that Lazarus will rise, put that hope in me, I am the one who will make that happen.

Folks, we grow up hearing about the resurrection from the dead. We grow up being told that when we die, we go to heaven. We believe these things (and in many ways that is good.) But all too often our hope is in those things. We hope they are just automatically given to us, a rite of passage. We don't really think about how they come to be, or why they happen. These things only happen because of Jesus, they are only made real for us when our hope is in Jesus.

Where is our hope? Is our hope of heaven found in Jesus. Why do we believe we are going to heaven? Is it because we have believed in Jesus. If we believe in Jesus then our hope is not for something that comes after death, our hope is lived out today. If we believe in Jesus, then we will live for him today. He will be the centre of our lives today.

I hope you understand what I am trying to say. If we believe that we will be raised from the dead, if we believe that a loved one will be raised from the dead and that we will see them again – that hope is only sure and certain if it is rooted in Jesus, and it is only rooted in Jesus if we are believing and trusting him with our lives now.

When Jesus ordered that the stone be removed from Lazarus' grave, Martha objected. She was worried about the smell. She was still in the place where she believed Lazarus would somehow

be raised, but not in the place where that would happen because of Jesus. Jesus wasn't yet the person she was trusting in, it was still an idea, simply something she had been taught as a child. And so, Jesus said to her, **'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'** (John 11:40) In other words, Martha, stop believing in something obscure, look to me. Trust me. Do what I ask, believe me by doing what I ask.

If there is anything in this world that still frightens us, it is death. Maybe especially the death of a loved one. We worry about them, what will happen... will we see them again... In a world where we have conquered so much, we have not conquered death and there is no real prospect of that happening either.

Yet Jesus is saying to us, trust me, but trust me now.

We might well believe in heaven and hell. We might well believe in an afterlife. We might even believe that one day Jesus will return to accomplish all of this. If we want to trust Jesus with our death, then we have to trust him with our lives. ***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. Do you believe this?*** (John 11: 25-26)

Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Folks, let's live by believing in Jesus, let's root our hope for the future in something real, something secure, something that we can build on – let's not put our hope in something that is airy fairy, something that isn't based on anything secure. Believe in Jesus, live believing in Jesus.