



Unbound

Sermon Growth Guide

March 26, 2023

Why?

Sermon Growth Guide

March 26, 2023

Unbound - "Why?"

John 11:28-37 (ESV)

Key Verse: John 11:25 (ESV) 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."

Big Idea: In every "why" moment, God is with us.



Foundations

Contrast. Day and Night. Bright stars in a night sky. Joy and sorrow. Weeping and laughing.

Or how about in our text today, the Author of Life weeping in the face of death.

Throughout our Lenten sermon series, **Unbound**, we're in the gospel of John, chapter 11. Last week, Martha. This week, Mary. Martha and Mary, two sisters whose actions contrast one another.

Last week, Martha made a stunning declaration of faith, "but even now!"

This week, Mary asks, "Why"?

How do you respond when death comes in all of its fury and terror and, yes, power? Do you relate with Martha and say, "But even now!" Or do you relate with Mary and crumble to the floor in utter heartache?

Where is God when bad things happen? Why does God let bad things happen?

Spend time hearing from one another. Consider sharing when you have asked "why?" to God. How can you even more be with one another as a Life Group through life's hardest moments?

Understanding God's Word

Together, read John 11:28-37.

How is faith portrayed in this text?

Where is doubt portrayed in this text?

Why did Jesus weep?

What do Jesus' actions teach us?

Applying God's Word

In every "why" moment, God is with us.

Identify a moment or season of your life when you felt abandoned by God. Spend time considering together—and praying together—how God might have actually been with you, even in the midst of great pain and sorrow.

Witnessing God's Word

What height of gladness to know that God is with us, even and especially in our times of deep sorrow and felt isolation.

Who around you needs this deep gladness? Spend time praying for their salvation and healing. Consider how you can once again reach toward them with the love of Christ.

Contrast. Day and Night. Bright stars in a night sky. Joy and sorrow. Weeping and laughing. Or how about in our text today, the Author of Life weeping in the face of death.

Throughout our Lenten sermon series, **Unbound**, we're in the gospel of John, chapter 11. Last week, Martha. This week, Mary. Martha and Mary, two sisters whose actions contrast one another. Tim retold the Luke 10 account last week: Busy-Body Martha, Chill Mary. Back in John 11, Martha runs immediately to Jesus, but Mary remains where she is. Interestingly, and it is surely emphatic, when both Martha and Mary encounter Jesus in John 11, our text today, they both rush to Jesus to say something first, *and they say the exact same statement*, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." That's not contrast, that's repetition. What is contrasted, however, is where the two sisters go from that central belief. Central belief: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Last week, Martha continues that central belief to make one of the greatest declarations of faith in all of Scripture, "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Faith-filled Martha, "But even now!" Mary is in a different place, isn't she? Mary does not continue speaking. Mary doesn't go on with more words. She states the same central belief: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Period. Mary barely gets it out. Maybe Jesus barely makes it out. After all, unlike Martha, who presumably was talking to Jesus face-to-face, Mary is sobbing on the floor, having fallen at the feet of Jesus. 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" (John 11:32). Martha had gone on to say, "Lord, I believe." Mary's body, (my paraphrase here), sobbing uncontrollably on the floor, cries out with the question, "Why?"

"Why?" is a powerful question that hits every one of us. I'd like to share a story that is deeply personal to me. August 4, 1968, Nashville, Tennessee. It's dark, it's nighttime and my 8-year-old dad is

confused and scarred and running to a neighbor's house to get help. A handful of moments later, my dad is sitting alone in the corner of his dad's bedroom watching his dad die from a heart attack. My dad's family were Christian by any account, church going people who, like Martha and Mary, believed that "Lord, if you had been here, my (dad) would not have died." My dad felt alone and terrified and left wondering, "Why?"

In your own life, when's the last time you have been left asking, "Why?" How do you respond when death comes in all of its fury and terror and, yes, power? Do you relate with Martha and say, "But even now!" Or do you relate with Mary and crumble to the floor in utter heartache? Both are valid. I've certainly experienced both responses in my own life. What about you? Through your own life experiences, have you experienced high moments of faith and other times of feeling as if you're just holding on through your own "why" questions?

Verse 33: "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" (John 11:33). Jesus receives Mary. Mary is an emotional mess, and rightly so, wouldn't you agree? Mary's brother, Lazarus, has died an early death and Mary collapses before Jesus in her grief. Jesus is with Mary. Jesus is deeply moved and greatly troubled. There's a fairly wide range of possibilities here as to why Jesus is deeply moved and greatly troubled.

Why was Jesus troubled? Isn't Jesus God? Here's what I am convinced of, the divine, steadfast, loyal love of God pulls human pain in, never pushes human pain away. Jesus is pulling Mary in. God knows full well better than any of us of the sheer horror sin has unleashed upon the human race. Jesus sees all this pain and He moves in close. You cannot be "deeply moved and greatly troubled" and not move in close. Proximity is key to these emotions. God sees you this morning. God sees your deepest pain and He is with you and pulling you in close.

Does Jesus not know that the woman who weeps before Him will, in a few day's time, fall at his feet again, this time anointing him Lord? Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for Him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with Him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:1-3). Mary sits under Jesus as a student. Jesus, who has let this woman, a woman, sit under His teaching and then anoint Him. Unheard of. Jesus is moving in close—close to individual people and close to full societies and cultures. Jesus is turning the world upside down.

As Tim said, we want to see a different dimension of Mary in this series. Mary is known traditionally as more heart than head, but do you know, to sit “at the feet” of a teacher is the way you talk about taking a theological education in Mary's day. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. That's part of what upset Martha at the time. You know, when Martha was working and Mary was sitting. But Mary wasn't avoiding work; she was seeking education. That makes a lot more sense when Jesus says, “Mary has chosen a good thing and it will not be taken away from her.” Mary is being disciplined under Jesus, and Jesus says no one can take that away. Not even her sister. Look now at what her sister says in our passage. When Jesus arrives, Martha does not say “the Lord is here” or “the Savior is here” or “the Rabbi is here.” Rather, Martha exclaims, “The Teacher is here.” Mary is a thinker. A woman getting taught by a teacher. A theology on fire. A sharp mind with a warmed heart. That's Mary. Do you see how important that is in her time, and for all time? Mary, your teacher is here.

Jesus speaks: And He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see (John 11:34). Where is Lazarus? Where is my friend? Where have you laid him? Jesus, the all-knowing Lord

who established the heavens, being told to “come and see,” the very phrase Jesus uses to call His disciples earlier in John. Then we come to what we so famously remember as “the shortest verse in the Bible,” John 11:35. Read it with me: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). It's a startling image, isn't it?

Mary hears that her teacher is looking for her. She goes to Jesus, falls down before her teacher, weeping. Jesus is deeply moved and greatly troubled, and, now weeps. *Why is Jesus weeping? Why would Jesus not be weeping?* Jesus weeps because his friend is weeping. Jesus weeps because, well, look at what sin has done to the place, look at what sin has done to Lazarus. The whole world has gone wrong. But Jesus has come to unbind the world. And Jesus knows what it will cost Him. Unbinding the world will cost Jesus, momentarily, His proximity to His Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46b).

This morning Mary's heart tears open and tears flow down her face. Mary is essentially asking, “Why?” Jesus, why did you let this happen? Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. You weren't here. *You weren't with me* and you weren't with Laz, and now he's dead. He's dead, Jesus! Why?

Mary is not the only person asking, “Why” in today's passage. Verses 36 and 37: “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?’” Contrast. On the one hand, “See how he loved him.” On the other hand, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” This is another “why” question. Jesus, why didn't you intervene? But it's a loaded question, too, isn't it?

There was then, and there is today, a great lie. In fact, dare I say it's one of the greatest lies, carried on the winds of the ages to all peoples of the earth. It is the great lie, that death, not life, is the final reality. “Where is Lazarus?,” Jesus asks. “Come and see,” they respond. Final

reality language. There he is, in the grave. That's his story, period. But is death the final reality, or is there something stronger than the grave? Might I suggest that when Jesus used the same phrase in the calling of His disciples, "come and see," He too was pointing to the final reality, but He was right, He was pointing to Himself, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, through whom everything was made that has been made. And in Him is life. And that life is the light of all mankind. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1-5). Brothers and sisters, this is the good news that I proclaim to you today: Jesus, not the grave, is the final reality. Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus can heal before death? That's good faith, but not the deep faith you're invited into. You are invited into the Christian faith that sees the true final reality, Jesus Christ, who can just as well call a corpse back to life as he can call the lame to walk. Over the next two Sundays—Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday—let us behold together, the lamb of God who unbinds the world with resurrection power.

I personally do not know anyone who has not asked this question in the face of deep sorrow: "Why?" In my own life: God, why did you let this happen? God, why did Joel die on his motorcycle? God, why didn't you heal Carey of her cancer? God, why has my best friend walked away from you? God, why is my life still a mess? God, why? Last week, Martha cried out, "I believe!" This week, Mary crumbles in pain and asks, "Why?" Both are valid.

For 30 years, my dad lived with the pain that comes when you believe in God, but you think God has turned His back on you. My dad was 8 years old, sitting in the corner of his dad's bedroom, watching his dad die, watching the ambulance roll up too late and with no oxygen, just morphine—"please, just a little more

morphine." To feel abandoned when death arrives is no small thing. That feeling is real.

A few years ago my dad was praying with some of his friends at church. One thing led to another and his friends began praying over the pain dad had held up, deep inside, for 30 years. Then dad had a vision. You know, a vision, in your heart's eye. Plain as day, the boy who had been weeping alone for 30 years in that corner was not alone in the slightest. Now when my dad remembers this dark night, August 4, 1968, my dad sees Jesus sitting with him, holding him, weeping with him, holding that 8-year-old boy with the love and strength of heaven.

I don't have answers for all of your "why" questions to God. But what I do know I share with you now: God is with you. We ask, "Why?" Jesus says, "I am with you." Contrast. Jesus says, "Blessed are (you) who mourn, for (you) shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). One name for Jesus is Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Jesus is with us. Jesus wept with Mary. Jesus wept, and still weeps, with my dad. And Jesus is with you, too. Whatever your pain is. However many moments that is for you. If you belong to God, He has been with you through it all. God is with you now. God will always be with you. You don't need a certain experience to know this. You need Jesus to know this. Take Jesus for it, His word, who conquered death and declared, "And behold, *I am with you always*, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). Whatever trench of life you have been in, are in, or will be in, may faith arise in you now to know that in Christ you are not alone, you've never been alone, Jesus is with you, holding you, weeping with you.

Let's pray. *Jesus, thank you for being with us. Thank you for weeping with us. Thank you that where we ask "why?" you are "with."* Thank you for making a way for us to have life in place of the grave. Thank you for unbinding us. Give us now the faith and courage to see you with us in our pain. Give us courage to live for you and you alone, for the sake of the lost being found. Amen.