

*This story was told by storytellers George and Mary Huttar and Leo Skinner. Please read the story. Read also Deuteronomy 8:1-3, 5-10*

Most of you are familiar with this picture which hangs in my office. It's a wonderful piece; I look at it every day and it encourages me. As you can see in this picture, a businessman is having a conversation with Jesus, and he's fairly serious about it. He might be addressing some issues of importance in his work.

He's having a serious conversation with Jesus about his concerns.

Let's imagine this morning that you are the one seated in that chair. You are having a conversation with Jesus. Now it is not unusual for me to suggest that you have a conversation with Jesus. God speaks; in fact, it is necessary in order to grow in faith for you to speak to God and listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. So this morning I want you to imagine a conversation with Jesus. Envision yourself sitting in that chair in the picture, across from Jesus Christ and He says this to you,

“You need more faith.”

And, if you are like me you might think, “True. That is true, indeed. In fact, I need more faith, right now.” I doubt that we would say, “No thanks, I've got all I need.”

Jesus replies, “I am going to strengthen your faith.”

The story which you heard about Lazarus is ultimately about Jesus strengthening the disciples' faith, and ours too. The disciples were really going to need it because a major trial was coming; the trial of the cross. And we have our crosses, too.

And so, we need our faith strengthened, too.

You heard the story. Jesus and the disciples got word that Lazarus was dying. Lazarus was Jesus' friend, as were his sisters. They had entertained Him in their home and the sisters had gotten in a fight over how much work each one was or was not doing (Lk 10:38-42). Isn't it great how real the Bible is? It tells us what goes on behind closed doors! Now Lazarus and his sisters lived a day's walk from where Jesus was staying – 15 or 20 miles.

Jesus could have rushed there as soon as He received the news and probably made it, but He did not. Instead, He said something strange about this not ending in death; but this illness was to glorify God.

How did Jesus know that?

He talked to God constantly. In fact, Jesus had told the disciples once,

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing . . . For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works . . . Then you will truly be

astonished. For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants" (Jn 5:19-21).

So Jesus was completely in connection with God and doing the works of God, even though to everyone around Him, He looked like an ordinary man.

And, God was about to manifest something powerful and completely compassionate through Jesus. This is the way it happened.

Lazarus died. There was no doubt. And four days passed. No Jesus.

Have you ever felt that your faith was challenged in that way? The sisters' faith was deeply challenged and they didn't understand. But we have been told that more is going on than meets the eye.

I encourage you in those times when you don't understand God that you press on despite the pain to continue to seek God. Yes, at these times, we are tested to the max, and the faith of these sisters was indeed tested to the max.

You have to go through death before you can get to the miracle of life.

There's a Latin phrase that describes this, "ex nihilo" – out of nothing. God creates something out of nothing. For example, this expression is used to describe how God created the world out of nothing. In this case, there was nothing Mary and Martha could do. They were powerless. But God is never powerless.

The Bible is filled with stories of God's power in the face of nothing.

Abraham and Sarah were old when God said, "You are going to have a baby" (Gen 18:10-11). Would you agree that God created something "ex nihilo" out of them?

Moses was a "wanted" man, a murderer in exile when God said to him, "You will go to Pharaoh and secure the release of your people" (Ex 3). Would you agree that God did this "ex nihilo" or out of no strength inherent in Moses. In other words, it was not Moses' ability but God's power that overcame Pharaoh in Egypt.

Someone a little closer to us in time was George Müller, a pastor who ran orphanages in Bristol, England. He was a thief in his younger days until he went to seminary, where he became a Christian. No one would have ever expected him to be a successful pastor, yet he established orphanages which cared for over 10,000 children. He funded this effort entirely through prayer, expecting every prayer to be answered. Often he had nothing – even sitting down at the breakfast table with a roomful of kids. They prayed, thanking God for breakfast, when there wasn't a single piece of food in the house. Every single time God provided, even up to the last hour. George lived under this principle of "ex nihilo." He believed he could do nothing but God could do everything. He asked God to do everything he needed.

God raised Lazarus “ex nihilo,” out of death, or “out of nothing” to life.

Out of sheer grace and magnificent power God raised Lazarus from the dead.

Just like the resurrection that would happen for Jesus not too long after this, God exercised God's tremendous authority over death for the sisters by bringing their brother back to life.

The passage that was read earlier said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Deut 8:3). That is a higher plane that means we must not just look at life as what we can see, but reach for, pray for, and believe that God can do the impossible, even though we are nothing.

“Lazarus, come out!” Jesus cried.

Now, this was an amazing feat. This is a fantastic display of God's power. God can do exceedingly abundantly, more than you can ask or imagine. When you have absolutely no power in yourself.

Lazarus did nothing except be dead!

However, there are some requirements and expectations. You know – like the conversation you need to have with him in that chair:

She says: *If you had been here . . .*

He says: *Your brother will rise . . .*

She says: *Yes, I know all that; he will be resurrected on the last day way out there in the future*

He says: *I am the resurrection and the life . . . those who believe will experience that very life, even though they die . . .*

She's shocked, so she said nothing.

He says: *Do you believe this?*

She says: *Yes. You are the one who saves me.*

But everyone is crying, saying, “*Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?*”

We all struggle with faith. There is not a soul in this room who hasn't doubted Jesus in this way. We each in our own way say, “He is not enough and He was not here.” I suspect that their sadness and low view of Jesus' power was the reason for His agitation and tears.

Jesus cried, because it was so hard for people to realize the power and love of God.

So to build their faith he came to the tomb and said, “*Take away the stone!*”

They said, “NO” in protest.

Jesus said, “*Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?*”

And so they did it, and out Lazarus came!

This story is about more than a fantastic physical resurrection. It is about learning that “humans – Christians – do not live by bread alone,” but by Faith, by “ex nihilo.”

As we pray for one another, let us understand that God’s power through Jesus is absolutely unlimited because God can create something out of nothing. Let us have faith, Lord Jesus.

AMEN