

This is a chapel talk I gave at Houghton Academy Spring 2023. It was written for middle and high school students, but I hope you find it to be a blessing. We serve a God who works miracles every day.

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(Family Picture 2020) Look at this beautiful family. We look like a happy family, right? We say that a "normal" American family has two kids and a dog. Well, I'm allergic to dogs so I have two weird kids and a hedgehog. But from the outside we look pretty normal.

Well, what you can't see in this picture is that at that time my heart was breaking. Not long after this picture was taken, I took our kids and left my husband. A year *before* this picture, my husband admitted he is an alcoholic. If you know anything about addiction you know that just resolving to quit is not enough. And if you have experience with an addict, you know that even if they're a kind, loving, wonderful person, they still lie, make bad choices, and inevitably destroy relationships. So, fast-forward through a year of promises to quit, lies, anger, tears, heartbreak on both sides. Eventually it became clear that these lies were going to drag me down and break our marriage for good if nothing changed. If nothing changed, my kids would grow up with an alcoholic father who couldn't be relied upon and who made bad decisions. So, to save us I had to take the kids and leave.

Not long after this photo was taken, I took the kids and we moved here to Houghton, where my parents live. All of a sudden, I was a single mom with a 5-year-old and a 3-year-old. I was dealing with my own hurt and brokenness and anger and trying to navigate the complicated emotions of my kids. We left everything my kids had ever known. My close friends, their friends, our community, our favorite places to go, our stability... After the move, Pascal was just angry. He didn't understand what was happening. Phoebe would have panic attacks. It's the hardest thing in the world when all you can do for your hurting child is cry with them. I was heartbroken and unbelievably angry. *I was a good person. I married a good man. We follow Jesus. We are his friends. Isn't he supposed to take care of us?*

Let's pause my story there. I was going to read you John chapter 11 but it's really long and for my purpose here, it's better told as a story. Some of you know the story of a man named Lazarus. Lazarus had two sisters, Mary and Martha, and all three were close friends of Jesus. He would come stay at their house when he was passing through. Now you'd think that being close friends with Jesus would be pretty great. He's always doing these incredible miracles, so you'd think, "Hey I know if I ever get sick, I've got the right friend. Jesus can just heal me with a word or a touch!"

Well Lazarus got really sick. So of course, the sisters send a message to Jesus. "Hey Lazarus is sick, come quick!" And you'd think Jesus would go immediately and heal him or even heal him from far away because he'd done both of those things for total strangers, so *of course* he'd do it for his friends, right? But no. Jesus hung out for two days before he did anything. By the time he took the time to travel there, Lazarus had been dead in a tomb for four days. Jesus could have healed Lazarus with a word and then come and had a party with him. Instead, he's arriving at a funeral. Martha hears that he's coming and goes out to meet him and says this incredible thing: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Imagine the pain and anger in that statement. *If you had been here, my brother would not have died.* And she has this incredible interaction with Jesus and goes back and says "Hey Mary, Jesus is here." Now here's something you should know about ancient Jewish culture. In that time if you lost a loved one you were supposed to stay indoors, low light, close the windows, shut the doors and mourn. It was socially acceptable, *expected*, for you to stay inside and shut out the world. So when Mary goes out, her friends are surprised. "She's not supposed to leave. But oh, she must be going to the tomb to weep. We'll go with her." But instead, she runs to Jesus. And again, her reaction is, *"Lord, if you had been here my brother*

would not have died!" In those days single women didn't have options. They had to rely on men to provide for them. So in addition to losing a beloved brother, they lost their financial support, their home, their freedom. So that statement that Martha and now Mary said to Jesus must have been so full of hurt and loss and anger. Wasn't Lazarus his friend? Weren't Mary and Martha his friends? Didn't Jesus care about them?

So back to me. I could have said the same thing. *Lord, if you had been there, my husband wouldn't be an alcoholic.* Some of you have experienced sorrow. You might say, Lord if you had been there my parents wouldn't have gotten divorced. My family and friends wouldn't be living in danger in my country. My friend wouldn't have died. My country wouldn't be at war. My mom wouldn't have gotten cancer. You might say, Lord if you had been there, *you wouldn't have let that person hurt me.* Don't you know me? Aren't I your friend?

And it's this crazy thing: Jesus goes to the tomb and he's angry and he weeps because he knows the pain that we live with and death is *terrible*. And he tells the people to roll the stone away from the tomb. They protest. "Four days! Gross!" But they roll it away. And, then, finally, FINALLY Jesus chooses to use his words. He says, "Lazarus, come out!" and Lazarus comes out alive.

And here's the thing. You have a choice. When you experience sorrow, you can do what is socially acceptable and expected. You can isolate yourself. Remain in your sorrow and mourning. Stay in the dark because I KNOW how it feels when all you want to do is stay in bed and never get up. I know how that feels. But you have a choice. You can choose to leave that darkness. Run to Jesus and bring him all your hurt and sorrow and even your anger! Tell him how angry you are! Fill in your statement, "Lord if you had been here _____. " And then wait, listen, watch. Wait for him to do a miracle.

But here's another thing to consider. Mary and Martha *thought* they knew what miracle they wanted. They wanted Jesus to come and heal Lazarus while he was sick. Then when he didn't, they thought, "That was your chance, and you missed it, Jesus!" Death is the end! It's too late now!" And then Jesus shows his power. *Sometimes you think you know the miracle you want. And God has other plans.*

Now, if you've been listening to your English teachers, you probably have heard them talk about paying attention to Point of View when you read. In this story we've looked at the point of view of Mary and Martha bringing their sorrow to Jesus. But there's another point of view to consider. Lazarus. So sometimes you'll be like Mary and Martha and you'll see Jesus work a miracle in another person's life. Imagine how they watched with shock and joy as Lazarus came out alive!

But your point of view might be like Lazarus'. Jesus may be waiting to raise your broken spirit to life. The miracle may be God restoring your peace and your joy and bringing you back to life after sorrow. *You may be the one that comes stumbling out of the tomb into God's light.*

When I left my husband, I had to accept that I couldn't control what happened next for him. I took my hurt and my anger to God. Again. And again. For years. And I saw a miracle. God took that anger away from me before Ian had stopped drinking. He restored my inner peace and showed me bright spots of joy within the sorrow even before Ian and I were reunited.

(Family picture 2021) And here we are a year after I made the decision to leave. This is when we made the decision that Ian was stable enough to join us again. Ian had gone to rehab and gotten counseling and medication. He'd sought God and community support, and he lapsed multiple times because recovery is never a straight path, but with the combination of all of those things, God also worked a miracle in his life.

We don't know in what ways God will answer. We don't know his timing. If Lazarus hadn't gotten sick, we never would have heard of him. If he hadn't died, no one would have gotten to see Jesus display his

unimaginable power. If I'd had what I wanted, Ian never would have been an alcoholic. But that's not how God works. God doesn't prevent bad things from happening to his friends. But he stays with you through the bad times and he brings good out of bad situations. If my life had been easier, I never would have seen God work so deeply in my life or in Ian's. I wouldn't be here sharing my experiences with you. So my message is this: take your big emotions to God. Step out of the dark room of mourning, or the dark tomb of death, and run to Jesus and see how he works miracles in your life.

Final note: Ian and I now lead Celebrate Recovery which meets at 7pm on Thursday nights in CE 105. All are welcome to come find community and celebrate recovery from the "hurts, hang-ups, and habits" that try to control our lives.