



## Introduction

Christians believe that Jesus showed people what God is like. Whenever Jesus came across people who were sad or suffering in any way, they changed. On three occasions recorded in the Gospels this included raising people from the dead. Jesus' power and love transformed an end into a new beginning and he brought joy where there had been great sadness.

Christians see these particular miracles as signposts to what was going to happen to Jesus himself after his death on the cross. However, unlike the three 'back-to-life' stories, Jesus' resurrection would last forever.

The focus for the following session is the story of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha were especially close friends of Jesus. It seems that Jesus used to stay with them whenever he visited Jerusalem. So Lazarus' death must have been very sad news indeed and, according to the story, Jesus burst into tears when he heard of it. The story is also full of other very real emotions at a time of bereavement. Mary is angry that Jesus hadn't come sooner and Martha even dares to tell him so! Faced with such grief, Jesus does show the compassion of God, turning their mourning into laughter (John 11:1-44). The crowds take this as a sign of how special Jesus is.

This story explores the possible feelings of the characters involved, and asks what the story might mean for us today.

What follows are some ideas that can be used to explore this story with children in an assembly or in the classroom. *However, as the subject matter is sensitive, it may well work best just as a classroom activity.*

N.B. As this topic deals with a death in a family, you will need to be particularly sensitive, if there is any similar situation at your school/ in your class.

## Preparation

Use the story as it is retold in The Barnabas Children's Bible, pages 252 to 253, story 285, 'Life after death'.

You will also need a lot of different colours that children can pick up - cloths, squares of felt, paint sample collection leaflets or similar.

## Development

1. Spread out the different colours. Talk about the way different moods and feelings match different colours, like yellow or green for illness, red for anger, blue for sadness. In some countries, black is the colour that people wear at funerals, and in some countries, it's white.



What colour would the children choose for death? And for life?

And sometimes feelings need more complicated mixtures, and we won't always agree.

2. Tell the story in sections. Jesus was a friend of a certain family. There were two sisters and one brother in this family. The sisters were called Martha and Mary, and the brother was called Lazarus. One day Lazarus fell ill - very ill.

*What colour might go with how Lazarus felt?*

*What about the colour for how his sisters might have felt?*

The sisters sent for Jesus, with a message that said, 'Come quickly, your friend Lazarus is dying.'

*How do they think Jesus felt? Choose a colour.*

But Jesus stayed where he was. Jesus waited for two whole days before he left.

*How do they think the sisters felt when Jesus didn't come? Choose a colour.*

By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days and was in a tomb.

*What colour would go with Martha now?*

Martha met Jesus and said, 'Lord, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. But even now, I know that God will do anything you ask.'

Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'

*What colour goes with these words?*

Jesus continued, 'Anyone who believes in me will live, even if they die. And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?'

And Martha replied, 'Yes Lord. I believe you are the Son of God.'

*What colour would go with Martha now?*

Martha ran to get Mary, who fell at Jesus' feet crying, and Jesus, too, burst into tears.

*What colour would go with Jesus now?*

They took Jesus to the tomb and he told them to open up the tomb door. Martha was worried that the body would be smelly.

*What colour would they put with Lazarus?*

Jesus prayed, then called out, 'Lazarus, come out!'

And Lazarus came out, still wrapped in his burial cloth.

*What colour would go with Lazarus now?*

Mary and Martha took Lazarus home, and many people believed in Jesus, though some were angry with him.

*Now, if the children had to tell the whole story through colours, what colours would they choose and in what order?*

3. Use the picture of Lazarus as he comes out of the tomb from page 252 of The Barnabas Children's Bible or a similar picture from another Bible storybook. Try to recreate the scene, using some children to be the different characters in it. Find out what they might be saying or thinking at that moment. Keeping the same characters, ask them to make a similar freeze-frame picture of what happened just before this scene, and what happens just after it. Then run the three scenes as a short play.

N.B. You might like to do the standard 'wrapping a friend up in toilet roll' for the grave clothes activity, as a light-hearted introduction to the story - thus mimicking what Lazarus must have looked like as he emerged from the grave.

4. As follow-up to this story, ask a few of these questions:

Why do you think Jesus didn't just stop Lazarus from dying in the first place?

Why do you think Jesus burst into tears when he saw Mary crying?

How does that make you feel about Jesus?

Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead: how do you think Martha and Mary felt about Jesus doing that?

What puzzles you about this story?

What do you like best about this story?

What do you want to take away to think about?

5. For a time of reflection, plant some seeds together, and think about the way we bury the seeds in the ground and then they come to life as something that is completely different and wonderful.

Jesus promised, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'



Christians believe that even when they die, like the seed being buried, Jesus will give them a new, different and wonderful life with him.