

Sometimes it seems like faith doesn't matter. One Sunday morning we sleep in and skip church. A kid misbehaves and we use abusive words. We take a chance to cheat without getting caught. We gamble a little more than we should. We watch pornography on television. We think nobody gets hurt. Whenever we give in and get by, it seems like faith doesn't matter.

At other times it seems like faith is all that matters. We take a strong stand on abortion in the presence of others. An emergency happens to the family and we call friends for prayer. Week after week we share communion as God dwells in each one of us and in all of us. At those times, when we are heart and soul in the presence of God, faith is all that matters.

Throughout the gospels Jesus tries to shake people out of their indifference and show them that faith matters. Faith means everything. He taught people with words, but he got their full attention with his deeds. The gospels tell of three instances when Jesus raised someone from the dead: the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus. Of these, the most dramatic by far is the story of Lazarus.

In John's gospel, the raising of Lazarus is the last and greatest miracle Jesus works. It takes place near Jerusalem, just before his arrest. Jesus and Lazarus both became so popular afterwards, that this miracle leads directly to the arrest of Jesus in John's gospel.

In telling the story, the evangelist bends over backwards to point out that Lazarus is really dead. When Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. Martha is called "the dead man's sister," and she warns Jesus about the stench if they open the tomb. Any time Jesus raised someone from death to life, it was a miracle of staggering proportions. But Jesus brought the daughter of Jairus and the son of widow back to life before either of them had been buried. Some unbelievers probably wondered if they'd really died. In the story of Lazarus, the evangelist wants you to know in no uncertain terms that this man was dead, gone, buried and decaying. There could be no talk that maybe Lazarus hadn't fully died. Just before his arrest, Jesus demonstrated to his followers his ultimate power over life

and death. Faith matters to Jesus. Faith is ultimately a matter of life and death.

When people come forward for baptism, they are centering their whole life on Christ. When we celebrate Easter, we recommit ourselves to the one who guides us. Every decision we make, every friendship we forge, every prayer we offer – it all rests on faith. Even in the little things we'd rather ignore, faith matters.