

LARGE GROUP TALK ON JOHN 11 - by Frank Espinoza & Sarah Shin

I. Introduction

(Self, Theme for the Night, and Dia de Los Muertos)

Family is such an important thing to Latinos, and for many of us, it is everything. Familia is the essence of Latinos, very meaningful for us! I believe this is a God-honoring gift. So, tonight is a space for familia. Now, that being said, we're going to talk about some hard things. Death and mourning are hard things to talk about, right? If we're honest, we might even prefer to shy away from conversations like these. But I want to invite you into this space as a familia, and I'll promise to keep it real with y'all tonight.

Many of you came here because you heard about our beautiful display Vida!, which asks about how our families mourn loss (show picture here), and how we ourselves cope.

While Dia de los Muertos (*Day of the Dead - Translate as necessary in multiethnic spaces*) is more Mexican in its origins, the questions it addresses relate to us all: family, loss, mourning, and life. It also leads us to the questions of "what happens when I die?" **Those are questions worth exploring.**

So much about DDLM is about family, remembering family, celebrating and honoring who they are. It's a way of coping with grief, celebrating the life of loved ones and remembering their influence on our lives. However, when appropriated, the holiday/tradition loses meaning and is decorative like a sugar skull on a coffee mug. (I was in Madison this summer for a training and saw this!)

Tonight, we are familia (culturally this might feel different for some of you). So whether this is the first time you've been to large group or InterVarsity, I want you to get comfortable, settle in, make yourself at home! Can we do that? Hug your neighbor! Let's dive in.

We are here tonight to ask the questions: how do you mourn when you face loss? And whether you have or haven't, what gives you hope to move forward when you do?

II. Insert personal story of family mourning (1-2 min):

I remember when...

My grandfather passed away while I was a sophomore in college. It was hard being away from my family while he and they were going through this and I was in college. My grandfather was a hard-worker, who loved working with his hands, and cared for my grandmother and loved his family.

But while falling ill to one sickness, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and eventually, with both illnesses taking a toll on his body, he passed away less than a year after receiving the news.

Now of course, my family, grieved, and reflected on his life, but something that stood out for me was the two, very opposite reactions of two of my uncles during that time. One Uncle really struggled with his ability to cope and process his father's death, and even became upset and bitter, even towards God. My other uncle, on the other hand, through my grandfather's death, came to faith and decided to place his trust and life in Jesus. He stated this was the only way he could get by, and the only way he'd be able to see my grandfather again.

No matter our spiritual/ethnic background, all of us are affected by loss. And all of us at some point will face death. How about you, how has loss, mourning, and death touched your life? What gives you hope?

Discuss in pairs (3-4 minutes):

What does your family believe about life after death? Where does that idea come from?

III. Lazarus' death

I want to share with you a story from the book of John of how a family experiences mourning and responds to loss.

[Compelling story, highlight the tension, draw them in and leave a hook. Use a Latino lens.]

- Highlight tension of relationships, Use Spanish names
 - Marta (Martha), María (Mary), Lazaro (Lazarus) Jesús (Jesus)

Other key moments from the story:

- Bethany: small village (barrio), poor, secluded, place for the sick, mixed peoples
- Seriousness of Lazarus' illness & Desperation of Mary and Martha
- Danger - Jesus getting stoned, he wasn't welcomed in this hood

Story picks up here (share as narrative):

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Señor," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

In this space of suffering and loss, Martha holds onto her understanding of Jesus as healer and connection to God. Martha's saying, yeah, you could have been able to stop my brother from dying. But I know that God will still hear and give you for what you ask!

But then Jesus says this interesting statement:

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

What does this mean? Some things to know are that in this culture, Martha's people, her gente, were known as the Israelites, had some different views about the afterlife. Some believed that when you die, you're dead, there is nothing else. But others, like Martha, believed that one day, God would resurrect all the people who trusted in him for hope, and that they would share in the peace and shalom of that final resurrection together and live forever. Martha has a lot of hope, even in the midst of pain.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Dang! Martha just mentioned the idea of a final resurrection to Jesus, and he says, *I am that final resurrection*. And he says, those who believe, or trust, in him will live though they die, and those who believe in him will never die. These are some big claims.

Martha replies,

27 "Yes, Señor," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Martha responds to Jesus' statement with an affirmation that he is the one God has promised that would deliver the people of Israel from their oppression, sorrow, and pain (calls him Messiah!). Again, her people, the Israelites longed for and waited expectantly for a promised Messiah, whom their ancestors and prophets from the Old Testament talked about. She believes Jesus is deeply connected to God, and in many places throughout the stories of Jesus, he claims to be God himself. Here Martha confesses, you are that person.

When Martha goes back to tell her sister Jesus is calling her.

31 “When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.”

But instead, full of tears and confused because of her brother’s death, she goes to meet Jesus.

- Just like Martha, she too was weeping, and the text says that the Jews who were with her were also weeping
- I get Martha and Mary, I empathize with them.

IV. Insert story of God being with us in suffering (3-4 min):

You see while I was preparing this talk and even now as I'm up here speaking to you all here at UTSA/UTD, my grandmother is back in San Antonio, lying sick in her bed. Almost a week ago, she got placed on hospice care. For those of you who don't what hospice care is, it essentially means that the doctors told her they basically couldn't do anything further that would help her current state of health. Her body and health are declining pretty rapidly, so they allowed her to return to the comfort of her home to be with loved ones. There was nothing more they can do. So I get Martha and Mary's reaction, I get their frustration and pain.

And maybe you can imagine how my family felt hearing this news: To be told the powerful, matriarch of the family who provided, knew how to stretch a dollar, and cared for the well-being of the family was to return home without hope of improving.

Yes, my family is mourning, but something that we're also doing and have done is celebrating and honoring my grandmother while she's still with us. I remember being at family parties and dancing Tejano music with my grandma. She loved to dance! Two things she loved: playing bingo, and dancing. And because of that, when she got sent home on hospice, recently my family and I got mariachis to come play some of her favorite music. (picture) as my grandma lay inside on her bed, she isn't visible, the rest of my family, my parents, siblings, tias, tios, primos, her own sister and their family, friends from down the street, sat and stood outside on the porch to the home she's lived in ever since I was born.

And we didn't read it, but one thing I want to point out from this passage, is that it's not just Martha and Mary mourning. The word says that “many Jews” came to comfort Mary and Martha. Many Jews.

This is also my family and grandmother's current reality. So, I don't want to gloss over Martha and Mary's pain, mine and my family's pain or your pain.

Instead, I want to highlight the reality of who this Jesus is—in the midst of pain and suffering.

Jesus, when he interacts with Mary, he weeps with her. He loves this family. This is a God that weeps with people who suffer. He is not removed from their pain. Jesus wept seeing his friends hurting. And I know Jesus weeps with us, with me, with my family, as we stood and sat outside my grandmother's house listening to beautiful songs and instruments of mariachis playing in the background. We wept, and so did Jesus.

V. Back to Lazarus, resurrection

Much to Mary and her community's surprise, Jesus then says to remove the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb.

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Señor,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” 40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Instead of the stench of a dead body, Lazarus is resurrected. Jesus displays tremendous power as he prays for this miracle! Yes, he had just wept but the text also says he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled—in the original language, this meant that Jesus was angry! Not at Martha and the others mourning, but he was angry at death itself, at the darkness of it, and the pain it caused. He had just looked the enemy of death straight in the eye, and defeated it, at least, in this moment of Lazarus' life.

I can't imagine what this was like for Martha, she must have been going through a whirlwind of emotions. She had just watched her brother die a few days ago. Now this! What kind of joy and celebration would have flooded her heart, to see her brother walking, talking, breathing. This is one of the most powerful miracles written that Jesus performs.

Just as it's one of the most powerful miracles, so it is one of the most uncomfortable. When those people who tried to stone him, as I mentioned earlier, heard about him raising Lazarus from the dead, they thought, "well, he's too popular, he's claiming to be God himself *and* he raised someone from the dead? We need to get rid of this vato.

VI. Jesus' death and resurrection

So, not long after, in the following weeks, Jesus himself is sent to die, to a hung trial, and eventually he's executed on a cross. He was too much of a threat to the establishment; someone who raises the dead and claims to be God in person is too much to ignore.

It's now Jesus' family and friends who mourn deeply. They think that this is the end. Death had come back with a vengeance. It's as if there was this battle occurring between death and Jesus. Death threw a sucker-punch by taking Lazarus, but Jesus returns with an uppercut, and raises Lazarus from the dead. It's 1 to 1. But now, it seems that death has given the final lethal blow. Jesus was dead. He lay lifeless, 3 days within a tomb of his own. But, with like the greatest comebacks in the history of comebacks, by God's spirit Jesus is raised from the dead! He resurrects from the grave three days later, proving his words that is the resurrection and the life, breaking the chains of death once and for all. And now, he invites all those who trusted him to continue and share the hope of his healing, and resurrection promise to all those around.

Here is a key difference that lies between Lazarus and Jesus -- Lazarus will die again before he rises from the dead. Lazarus is just a man. Eventually, he would die. If this wasn't the case, and Lazarus was still alive, then he'd probably be here tonight telling a much better story and personal account of what happened. But he's not, because as we know, death is inevitable. But Jesus, on the other hand, claims to be God, the one who will wipe away every tear from every eye on the day of the final resurrection. And I want to pull out this reality of what Jesus did a little further.

VII. Share gospel

See, brokenness, pain, death, was never God's intention for us to encounter.

[Created for Good]

He created the world to be perfect, without pain and death, where we would have perfect lives, perfect relationships with family, and with God himself. There would be no tears. No mourning.

[Damaged by Evil]

But through our rejection to him, through our sin and rebellion against God as humanity, we put ourselves at the center, rather than God. Often our selfishness and self-reliance makes us hurt others, and as we look around us, we see the evil, decay, and death that results when humans put themselves at the center. Our world is full of war, racism, child abuse, suicide, drug addiction, and more. Every person has or will experience loss. And we all will have to face our own deaths.

By doing things our way instead of God's way, we caused and became prey to death, decay, and separation from others and from God himself. Grief touches each and every one of our lives.

[Restored for Better]

Jesus not only weeps, but he does something about death (through the cross!)

But God loves us too much to leave us to the consequences of our decisions and the pain and death that results. Jesus came to show us that he understands our pain, grief, and fear of death. But, in order for God to be back at the center of our lives, Jesus had to deal with our rebellion and betrayal, the things in us that cause harm to ourselves and others. Evil done to us often becomes evil done to others.

Instead of leaving us that way, Jesus entered into our mess, brokenness with family, and sin. Through his death and resurrection, he not only paid the penalty for our sin, but he faces down decay and death and proves that death is no longer final! He opens the door to transformation in our lives now and forever.

When we invite Jesus into our pain, grief, and experiences of death and make him the center of our lives, we trust him to give us life and life in the fullest.

[Sent to Heal]

As Jesus gives us hope in our areas of mourning, he also invites us to make a difference in our hurting world.

Jesus promises that one day, he will make all things new and that he will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Our broken and hurting world, our families and friends, need this hope and healing. He sends us out to heal, to serve, and to share about his Healing story of hope and life. We invite everyone into the familia of God and to share in this hope.

Jesus promises that as we lay down our lives for his sake, he will give us true life that satisfies now and lasts forever: life with purpose, love, joy, and depth.

This isn't just a story for me. It's also a story that Jesus wants to offer to you.

As Latinos, most of us grew up hearing something about Jesus, or God, or la Virgen de Guadalupe whether from our parents, or Sunday school, or from the people around us. But just as he asked Martha, do you believe this, so he is asking you all tonight, do you believe I am who I say I am? Do you, believe this?

He says,

"28 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'" - Matthew 11:28-29

Jesus says and proves this: "I am the resurrection and the life."

VIII. Invitation to Respond

We can't just hear this good news and not do anything about it, so today, I want to make a few different invitations to you all. Whether that's to be a part of Jesus' familia, experience healing in places of brokenness, comfort in places of loss, or sharing this story of hope and healing with those around you.

There are three different invitations for 3 different groups of you in here tonight that I want you to consider saying yes to:

Mission:

- This first invitation is for those of you who like Lazarus, have experienced healing and transformation by Jesus. Our campus and friends are hurting because of loss and brokenness. They need to be invited into God's family to experience new life and healing. If this is you, and you know someone around you who needs to be invited into God's family to experience new life and healing, whether it be your friends, family, organization or even somewhere halfway across the world, then would you say yes to being someone that invites those around you into God's familia and healing, and sharing his story of hope?

Prayer:

Jesus told Martha, "Whoever lives by believing in me will never die" and for those of us who have placed their faith in him, for each of you who have raised your hand to share this great news with others, I bless you in the name of Jesus to go and to spread life and resurrection in places of darkness and decay.

Re-commitment:

- Now, with eyes still closed, this second invitation is for those who have known God and said yes to him before, but maybe you've been distant lately or since you've come to college. Maybe there's an area of death/decay/sin in your life that's kept you from walking in the life Jesus has called you to. If this is you, and you need Jesus' healing and transformation, then I invite you to raise your hand as a sign of turning back to him.

Prayer:

Jesus, we thank you that you are loving, you are willing and you are able to step into our mess, and areas of death and decay. Right now, I speak resurrection life over my brothers and sisters who have raised their hand. We thank you for your grace and for the ability to turn back to you, who is our provider, our sustainer, our healer. Cover them in your grace and forgiveness, and with the joy that comes from knowing you. Amen.

New Believer:

- Now, with eyes still closed, this last invitation is for those of you who have never known this Jesus to be the resurrection and the life, who through his life and death, offers us new and eternal life to those who believe. And just as Jesus asked Martha, so he is asking you today. Do you believe this? Do you believe he is who he says he is? Do you consider yourself a part of God's familia, as someone who has experienced healing and loving relationship with Him? If you have never considered yourself apart of God's familia, or experienced his healing or loving relationship, and you would like to, then right now I invite you to raise your hand.

Prayer:

Jesus, I thank you for my new brothers and sisters who have raised their hands. Thank you for the new life and healing and transformation you bring. We thank you for the death you died on the cross for us, for the forgiveness of sins you bring, and for the new life you call us to. I pray protection over them, healing, and resurrection over every aspect of their lives.

Overall closing prayer for healing & new life: