**New Hope Sermon 10 6 21 Crabgrass in the Lawn of Faith**

**Introduction**

Faith has many ups and downs. It is certainly not a smooth upward path to continual trust in the Lord. In fact, Rod Cooper compares discouragement to the “crabgrass in the lawn of life. “ This can happen to us when our faith gets blocked or buffeted. He takes the crabgrass idea from a Peanuts cartoon:

The king of the comics, as far as I'm concerned, is still Peanuts by Charles Schulz. I love Linus, Lucy, Schroeder, Pigpen, the Little Red-Haired Girl, and Charlie Brown. There's a ring of reality to their relationships.

One sequence comes to mind. Linus has just written a comic strip of his own, and he wants Lucy's opinion. In the first frame, he tentatively hands Lucy his comic strip and says, "Lucy, would you read this and tell me if you think it is funny?" In the next frame, you see Lucy patting her foot, and a little bit of a grin comes across her face. She looks at Linus and says, "Well, Linus, who wrote this?"

Linus with his chest heaved out and a great big grin says, "Lucy, I wrote that." In the next frame, you see Lucy wadding it up, throwing it to the side, and saying, "Well, then, I don't think it's very funny."

In the final frame, you see Linus picking up his comic strip, throwing his blanket over his shoulder, looking at Lucy and saying, "Big sisters are the crab grass in the lawn of life."

We find that humorous. I dare say if you and I thought long and hard enough, we'd remember being the crab grass in the lawn of somebody else's life. None of us wants to be a loser. None of us wants to be a source of discouragement. And yet, if we're not careful, we can find ourselves being more pessimistic than optimistic, more discouraging than encouraging.Rod Cooper, "The Kiss of Encouragement," Preaching Today, Tape No. 141.

**Crabgrass – Discouragement and depression**

**are like crabgrass infiltrating your lawn of faith**

I think Jesus often finds us thinking negatively when we hit a discouraging time in our faith. So I want us to consider Martha’s faith journey as we see it in the story of Lazarus’s death. Let’s see how she got to that doubting, discouraged stance, what that did to her understanding of Jesus’ claims, what brought her back, and what we learn about our own faith journey and the mercy of God from how Jesus dealt with her throughout this traumatic time in her life. The Apostle John tells her story in John ch. 11.

**Simple, sincere grateful faith**

The story opens when Lazarus, Martha and Mary’s brother, became seriously ill. Immediately, the sisters sent word to Jesus to ask him to come quickly and heal their brother. Their message was simple, sincere and their experience of Jesus up to this point: “Lord, the one you love is sick.” (Jn.11:3). They knew Jesus’ love for their family. They had hosted him in their home. They had seen his miracles and heard his teaching. So they did not doubt that if he came, he would heal their brother.

Early stages of faith in Jesus are based on this simple, heart-felt relationship with the Lord. We too, have seen His miracles, experienced His answers to prayer, and celebrate his goodness. Up to this time in her journey, Martha could have easily echoed the words of David in Ps. 34: Lord! I’m bursting with joy over what you’ve done for me! My lips are full of perpetual praise. 2I’m boasting of you and all your works, so let all who are discouraged take heart. 3Join me, everyone! Let’s praise the Lord together., , Let’s make his name glorious to all. . . 8Drink deeply[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+34%3A+1-8&version=TPT#fen-TPT-440b)] of the pleasures of this God. Experience for yourself the joyous mercies he gives to all who turn to hide themselves in him. (Passion)

The sisters believed that if Jesus came, He would bring his miracle-deliverance powers and heal their brother. God loves this simple, confident faith.

**Crabgrass in one’s faith**

But Jesus did not come in time. In fact, the story goes on: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6Yet, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,” (John 11: 5-6). In that time, Lazarus died. Jesus had not met their well-founded expectations of what He usually did, and their expectation that he would come immediately to heal Lazarus.

As a result, the sisters’ first words to Jesus when he did come were: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”(Jn.11:21,32). When we have called out in faith to God, and He does not answer as we expect, our faith can turn to disappointment. And if that disappointment is not dealt with, that can turn to discouragement and then doubt and ultimately depression. Those attitudes in the lawn of faith become like crabgrass and must be rooted out.

This is where the community of faith needs to step in to bolster a believer’s faltering faith. But what often happens instead is that the community members – with well-meaning empathy – just reenforce the validity of our expectations. In Mary and Martha’s case we read that the Jews who were at graveside with Mary said: “ Couldn’t he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (Jn.11:37).

Yes, we need to show understanding of the struggles in people’s faith. But the New Testament is clear that such struggles are God’s way to deepen and broaden our faith. Paul tells the Roman Christians,

“Our faith guarantees us permanent access into this marvelous kindness[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.+5%3A1-5&version=TPT#fen-TPT-9375c)] that has given us a perfect relationship with God. What incredible joy bursts forth within us as we keep on celebrating our hope of experiencing God’s glory! 3But that’s not all! Even in times of trouble we have a joyful confidence, knowing that our pressures[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.+5%3A1-5&version=TPT#fen-TPT-9376d)] will develop in us patient endurance. 4And patient endurance will refine our character, and proven character leads us back to hope. 5And this hope is not a disappointing fantasy,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.+5%3A1-5&version=TPT#fen-TPT-9378e)] because we can now experience the endless love of God cascading into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who lives in us![[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.+5%3A1-5&version=TPT#fen-TPT-9378f) (Passion)]

James adds, 2 “My fellow believers, when it seems as though you are facing nothing but difficulties, see it as an invaluable opportunity to experience the greatest joy that you can! 3For you know that when your faith is tested,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+1%3A+2-4&version=TPT#fen-TPT-11557a)] it stirs up in you the power of endurance. 4And then as your endurance grows even stronger, it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking (Ja. 1:2-4, Passion)

So we need to help believers, struggling with their crabgrass attitudes in the lawn of life, root those negative thoughts out and entrust themselves again into God’s loving care. If they do not, their unbelief will actually close their minds to what God says can happen. We see this twice in Martha’s journey.

**Temporarily Blinded faith**

Look at the story from John 11: 21-4. By this time Jesus has arrived at Mary and Martha’s home.

21Martha said to Jesus, “My Lord, if only you had come sooner, my brother wouldn’t have died. 22But I know that if you were to ask God for anything, he would do it for you.” 23Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise and live.”24She replied, “Yes, I know he will rise with everyone else on resurrection day.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7901a)]

25“Martha,” Jesus said, “*You don’t have to wait until then.* I am[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7902b)] the Resurrection,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7902c)] and I am Life Eternal. Anyone who clings to me in faith, even though he dies, will live forever. 26And the one who lives by believing in me will never die.[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7903d)] Do you believe this?”[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7903e)] 27Then Martha replied, “Yes, Lord, I do! I’ve always believed that you are the Anointed One, the Son of God who has come into the world for us!” . . .32When Mary finally found Jesus outside the village, she fell at his feet in tears and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.”33When Jesus looked at Mary and saw her weeping at his feet, and all her friends who were with her grieving, he shuddered with emotion[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7910h)] and was deeply moved with tenderness and compassion. 34He said to them, “Where did you bury him?” “Lord, come with us and we’ll show you,” they replied.. . ..38Then Jesus, with intense emotions, came to the tomb—a cave with a stone placed over its entrance. 39Jesus told them, “Roll away the stone.”Then Martha said, “But Lord, it’s been four days since he died—by now his body is already decomposing!” 40Jesus looked at her and said, “Didn’t I tell you that if you will believe in me, you will see God unveil his power?”[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7917j)] (Passion)

Notice that Jesus tells Martha, at the beginning of their conversation, that her brother will rise again. He means right then in her immediate circumstance. But she is grieving so much, and perhaps still caught up in her crabgrass disappointment, that she missed the extraordinary promises Jesus gave her – not once but twice. He told her He is the Resurrection and the Life – a resurrection she could experience now through faith. But she deflected that promise and projected it into the distant future. We tend to do that too when we are temporarily blinded by our own disappointment or depression. We may still acknowledge doctrines for the future but have trouble believing them in our present. So, shortly after that, when Jesus told people to roll away the stone covering Lazarus grave site, she objected “But Lord.”. .

We should stop the story right there. “But Lord” is an oxymoron, beloved. We can tell him our hesitations – “But…this is the real circumstance. This is how I am feeling. This is what is really happening or has really happened.” And God understands that. However, once we attach “Lord” to our buts, then we are calling forth the God for whom nothing is impossible – the God for whom the “but” is not a problem, nor an obstacle he cannot remove. Martha’s faith could not imagine nor embrace the reality of what was about to happen and what Jesus had already told her He could do. Her doubt or disappointment with God had kept her from believing the words Jesus had just given her. So He rightly rebuked her blinded faith and said,40 ““Didn’t I tell you that if you will believe in me, you will see God unveil his power?”[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+21-40&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7917j)] (Passion)

**Joyous, mature faith because of God’s miracles**

John 11: 44-44:41So they rolled away the heavy stone. Jesus gazed into heaven and said, “Father, thank you[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+41-44&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7918a)] that you have heard my prayer, 42for you listen to every word I speak. Now, so that these who stand here with me will believe that you have sent me to the earth as your messenger, *I will use the power you have given me.*” 43Then with a loud voice Jesus shouted with authority: “Lazarus! Come out of the tomb!”44Then in front of everyone, Lazarus, who had died four days earlier, slowly hobbled out—he still had grave clothes tightly wrapped around his hands and feet and covering his face! Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him loose.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+11%3A+41-44&version=TPT#fen-TPT-7921b)] (Passion)

Now, what do you think happened to Martha’s faith? The joy she and Mary must have experienced would have no bounds. It was still grounded in their belief in Jesus’s power and love for them, but now validated by the miracle he performed for them. Still, I hope Martha also experienced remorse at her initial crabgrass response to Jesus’ not coming, and even her inability to accept his amazing claims right then in her context. True faith that has gone through testing always has a deep element of confession and repentance in it, if we are honest with ourselves and God. It understands our lack of faith and even our questioning of the character or goodness of God. Still, our very suffering and the work of God that eventually answers our deepest longings moves our faith to one that celebrates God’s mercy and goodness at a whole new level. Mercy because God acts despite our profound disappoint-ment in Him and the elements of sin that blocked His work initially in us. That new dimension of faith also moves one to a deeper level of gratitude than one ever experienced before. (We see this in ch. 12 of the gospel story as Mary pours out the expensive bottle of perfume on Jesus feet.) And this more mature faith now has grown to include perseverance that is able to accept God’s timing and what we often mistakenly feel is God’s abandonment or disinterest when His answers don’t come within our expected time limitation. I believe this evolution of Martha’s faith is what she experienced in the tragedy and then resounding victory of Lazarus death and resurrection from the dead right there in front of his family and all the mourners. So what about our faith, beloved?

**Application**

A number of our community, including me, are in the place where we have called out to God for miracles in our situation or even the global crisis of the virus . Yet, what we are longing for and expecting thus far has not happened. So how can Martha’s experiences help us?

* First, let us still call out to God, believing that He loves us and will hear our cry for help. There are many verses from the Psalms and the whole Bible that we can quote as we pray and wait.
* Second, let us do an attitude check on the level of our own disappointed expectations and cast the burdens of our feelings onto the Lord and let Him carry them and deliver us from them .

(I Pet. 5:7). “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. “NIV. “Pour out all your worries and stress upon him *and leave them there*, for he always tenderly cares for you.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=I+Peter+5%3A7&version=TPT#fen-TPT-11757a)]” Passion

Then , we can mount up with wings of eagles over the problems as we see them from the Lord’s perspective (Is. 40:27-31); O Jacob, how can you say the Lord does not see your troubles?
O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights? 28Have you never heard? Have you never

understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. 29He gives power to the weak

and strength to the powerless. 30Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall

in exhaustion. 31But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on

wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint (NLT)

* Fourth, let us go over the verses that promise God’s work on our behalf and His ability to do miracles:
* Ps. 57”1-3: Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy!  I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by. I cry out to God Most

High,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+57%3A1-3&version=NLT#fen-NLT-14747b)]  to God who will fulfill his purpose for me. He will send help from heaven to rescue me,. . My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness

* Luke 1; 34-41 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”35The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A34-37&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24929a)] the Son of God. 36Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37For nothing is impossible with God.”
* Eph.3:20: 20Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to Him be glory.

And finally, with the new gratitude, humility and perseverance that our trial of faith has wrought in us, let us tell the story about God’s eventual intervention – we will still say to people “Oh taste and see” (Ps. 34), but now we share a story for His glory and all the attention is directed to the Lord and not to us. This mature faith will emerge as we root out our crabgrass attitudes and the ways our distress blinds us to God’s promises in our immediate context. and we give joyous praise to our “miracle-delivering” God.

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