

## The Resurrection and the Life

### John 11

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” Those are beautiful, comforting words, words we desperately want to believe, especially when we stand beside the graves of our own loved ones. But how can we know they are true? How can we be sure that Jesus really has conquered death?

Well, what happened in this passage? Didn't Jesus raise His friend Lazarus from the dead? Didn't He walk up to Lazarus' tomb and cry out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth?” And even though Lazarus had been dead for four days, didn't he come back to life, and walk out of that tomb?

And didn't Jesus Himself do the same thing on the third day after His own death? In our responsive reading this morning, didn't the angel announce that He had risen from the dead, just as He had predicted? Didn't Jesus show Himself to the women who came to the tomb, and then to the disciples? Don't we have every reason to believe the truth of the great historical event we celebrate this morning, that Jesus rose from the dead?

But how does the bodily resurrection of Jesus matter in our everyday lives? So what if Jesus walked out of His tomb just as Lazarus walked out of his – what difference does that make to us today?

Well, think again about all the funerals we have attended since last Easter. For that matter, think about all the funerals we haven't been able to attend because of COVID. Oh yes, we have shared the experience of Martha and Mary and their friends all too often, grieving the loss of our loved ones. But what did Jesus tell Martha in the midst of her grief? “He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live.” The good news is that what happened to Lazarus in this story will happen to all who trust in Christ on the day that He returns. On that day, all our sorrows will be turned into joy.

But there's even better news than this. For what did Jesus go on to say in verse 26? “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” Now, at first glance, this doesn't make sense. After all, we can name many, many people who have in fact died even though we have every reason to believe that their faith in Christ was genuine. And how do Jesus' words square with what Jesus says in the previous verse: “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live?” How can it be true that believers in Jesus will never die, but at the same time we will live again even after we die?

Well, what is death, really? At root, it is a separation of things that were always intended to be together. We usually think about death as a separation of the body from the spirit, and that is the sort of death that Jesus overcame when He told Lazarus to walk out of that tomb. Lazarus' spirit was reunited with his body, and his physical death was thus undone.

But there is another kind of death – spiritual death. Spiritual death involves the separation not of a soul from a body, but separation of a whole person, body and soul, from God. That's the sort of death Jesus says that is undone when we believe in Him. That's the sort of new life we have when we place our trust in Him as our Lord and Savior.

And when you think about it, isn't that the kind of trust that Martha demonstrated in this passage? After all, in verse 27, she says she believes that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Son of God. And even though she doesn't expect Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead right then – in

other words, even though her faith in Christ was not perfect or complete – Jesus tells her in verse 40 that she will see the glory of God. And she did in fact see that glory as she saw her brother brought back to life.

And the good news is that those who share Martha's statement of faith, those who are truly trusting in the Lord Jesus can experience the same sort of undoing of death, the same sort of new birth not just in a physical way as Lazarus did, and not just at the day of Christ's coming when all our bodies and souls will be reunited. No, all those who trust in Christ can experience this new life, this resurrection life, right now, today.

But make no mistake – this undoing of death, this spiritual connection with the source of our life can only happen as we share the faith of Martha. For this passage makes it clear that only Jesus has the power to give people new life. Only Jesus can bring people back from either physical or spiritual death.

Now, it's true that the Old Testament prophet Elisha was able to bring a young man back from the dead. But as we will study in II Kings chapter 4 on Wednesday evening, Elisha had to pray to the Lord earnestly and make repeated physical contact with the child. Elisha's experience makes it obvious that the power to raise the dead wasn't his own, but came instead from God.

How different is the scene at the tomb of Lazarus! Yes, Jesus prays to the Father in verses 41 and 42, but He makes it clear that He's only praying for the benefit of those who are listening. And nowhere in His prayer does Jesus ask that His Father would raise Lazarus from the dead. No, it is on His own obviously divine authority that Jesus steps to the entrance of the tomb and commands Lazarus to come back to life.

And that is why Jesus says what He says at the beginning of verse 25 – He isn't just one way that some people find resurrection – He Himself is the resurrection. Jesus isn't just one way that some people find eternal life – He Himself is that life. And that is at least in part why we celebrate His resurrection today – because Jesus walked out of His tomb on the third day, we know that He is Who He says He is, the resurrection and the life.

But it is only by sharing Martha's statement of faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah, as the Son of God that this life can be ours. For we can only experience this new life, this resurrection life if we are plugged into Jesus, if we are made one with Him, if we are connected to the only true source of life and light.

And this is the same truth to which the Lord's Supper points. For just as Jesus associates the bread with His body, what does He tell us to do with it? Not to put it in a box or a picture frame and admire it. No, He tells those who trust in Him to take it, to eat it, and thus to receive Him into ourselves in a spiritual way. We thus experience resurrection life when the One Who is the life comes to live inside of us.

But how can sinners like us, how can those like Martha whose faith is incomplete hope to connect with Christ, the Son of God? Well, what does Jesus tell us about the fruit of the vine? He says that it is His Blood of the Covenant, it is His blood that is shed for the forgiveness of our sins. And where does He tell us to put this blood? Not on our skin, which would simply change our outward appearance. No, like the bread He associates with His body, He tells us to consume the fruit of the vine, taking it

inside of us. For the good news is that when we trust in Christ, He washes us clean of our sins from the inside out, purifying our hearts and making us more and more like Him.

So, do you want to experience new life now? Do you want to be sure that you will live with Jesus forever? Trust in the promised Messiah, the Son of God who died so that sinners like us can be forgiven. Trust in the One Who raised Lazarus from the dead. Trust in the One Who walked out of His own tomb on the third day. Trust in the One Who is the resurrection and the life. Believe His promises, and live.