

# “I am the Resurrection and the Life”

John 11:1-45

When pastors are given long Gospel readings like John 11:1-45 (by the way, there was an option to read all the way through verse 53); or like last week, when our Gospel was John 9:1-49; when pastors are given readings that are 3 or 4 times longer than average, there is the temptation to preach 3 or 4 times longer – especially now when we are preempted from have Holy Communion. And over the past week, I have gotten use to spending about an hour in the pulpit each day.

After all, it would be a shame for you to miss out on the richness of God’s Word of promise. There are so many options on which to preach. The Old Testament and Epistle readings have much to offer also. God’s Word is living and active. It speaks to our lives and the struggles we face, like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus faced. People we love get sick. People all throughout the world are faced with this new challenge of a new virus which is relatively benign to most and very deadly to others.

As I wrote in my newsletter article for April, it is for the sake of others that we make sacrifices. Even before this coronavirus came along, we have always been faced with the reality that people that we love; (from our perspective) good people; kind people; people who (from our perspective) “deserve” better. They get sick and they die, because the wages of sin is death.

God’s Word is not a collection of pious platitudes, wise little sayings to put on refrigerator magnets; it is not a “how-to” manual with instructions for living a better life. It is the history of God interacting, in real places, at

specific times in history, and bringing real and lasting change to sinful people who are and remain under the curse of Adam – “If you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will surely die.” The Bible is the history of how God fixed the problem of death.

In our Old Testament reading, God asks Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?” God answers His own question, “These bones will live! Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from the graves.” Ultimately, Jesus is the answer to that question, “Can these bones live?” God’s living and active Word is not just some deep philosophy of life that elevates your awareness of spiritual things. This message is for you. Jesus says, “I will open your grave and raise you from your grave. I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

It is easy for us to take God’s Word and His promises for granted. It is easy for us, like Martha, who was obviously a faithful and pious believer; it is easy for us to view salvation and the resurrection as being disconnected from Christ in the here and now. She says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” She clearly believes that Jesus can bring healing, even when all other medicine fails. She speaks in terms of faith that few others do. She says, “even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus says, “Your brother will rise again,” and she faithfully replies, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” And even before she sees Lazarus walk out of the tomb, Martha makes a beautiful confession of faith saying, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Martha speaks with firmness and conviction of faith that is rarely seen. Yet, when Jesus gives the order to “take away the stone,” Martha shows that the fullness of her understanding is still lacking, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” She has faith, but does not yet fully understand what this all means. In this way, she is a lot like us (if we are to be honest with ourselves) and she is certainly like

the rest of Jesus' disciples – even the 12 do not yet understand why the Son of God came into this world.

This is why Jesus stayed two days longer where He was, even after hearing that Lazarus was ill. He could have just said the word and sent the messenger back with the assurance that Lazarus will live. That was what He did when He healed the Roman Centurion's servant. But Lazarus died, and Jesus says, "for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe." He was glad that Lazarus died. I find that interesting. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints," the Psalmist says. But this is different. Jesus is glad for another reason. If Jesus had been there, He would have healed Lazarus.

But if Jesus says the word and commands that he is healed, or arrives in time to heal him, or arrives soon after Lazarus died and raises him from the dead, like he did with Jairus' daughter or the widow's son at Nain, the impact on the disciples and on the region of Bethany and Jerusalem would have been different. The disciples possibly could have taken this miracle for granted.

They have seen Him do this before. He has been healing people, driving out demons, even raising the dead for three years. Think for a minute at how absurd this concept is that the disciples would look at the miracles (even raising the dead) as "just another day with Jesus." But that is exactly what they did. It is like the Israelites in the wilderness with the Pillar of Cloud and Pillar of Fire always there, manna every morning, water from the Rock, and they still questioned if God was really with them.

Very often, the disciples said the right words. When Jesus speaks of Lazarus and says, "Let us go to him." Thomas boldly says, in the comfort of his friendly surroundings, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." On Easter evening, we get to hear about how Thomas really reacted to death and the concept of the resurrection when the climate around him was less comfortable. "Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place

my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” [Jn. 20:25].

When you are forced to deal with the uncomfortableness of life, which we are all forced to deal with that right now and it seems like it is going to go on for longer than any of us would like, don't take God's Word for granted. It is easy hear God's Word of promise and treat it as if it is ordinary. We get to hear His Word or read His Word any time we want. I hate to miss out on receiving the Sacrament. However, these past couple of weeks are a reminder of what a unique, miraculous blessing it is that we get to participate in the broken body and shed blood of the Son of God.

Hearing God's Word TODAY is a big deal, because it is the Word of God. How absurd is the concept that there is anything more important than what we are doing TODAY. Receiving the body and blood of Christ is a big deal, because it is the body and blood of the Son of God who came into this world. We are reminded that we are missing out on far more than economic activity these days.

The forgiveness of sins, salvation, eternal life, and the resurrection of the body is not some mystical philosophy about the spirit world. Jesus offered up His real body and blood at a specific moment in history to be the once and final sacrifice that would cover the sin of Adam (and all of our sin) and break the curse of death for Adam and all of us. The Son of God entered this world because He was the only One who could fix the problem of death.

And we are not disconnected from Christ in the here and now – even though we are disconnected from each other for a time. We cannot feed on His body and blood today, but he feeds us with His Word of Gospel that saves us. We cannot know what today or tomorrow will bring. One thing is certain. These bones shall live. Jesus says, “I will open your grave and raise you from your grave. I am the Resurrection and the Life.” Amen.