

JESUS, OUR RESURRECTION AND LIFE

JOHN 11:1-53

Good morning everyone! I hope you are doing well, staying safe and as healthy as you can be. Spring is around the corner, winter is being left behind and I am so happy this year. Some people do some spring cleaning and re-align their lives and plan to travel and all is excitement and preparation for some type of renewal. For all of you gardeners out there, this is time of start thinking about preparation for the renewal, redesign, redo of your garden.

We have a garden in our church and in last governance meeting we talked about preparing for the garden season and its administrations. Although winters are not popular, winter is important on this side of the hemisphere. For one, we wouldn't have spring if we didn't have winter. Winter is a time when we have settled indoors and feel comfortable. I love to sit down on the sofa and relax and read sometimes. We like to feel comfortable! It is nice . Life is good if you have heat, hot soups, hot meals, and hot drinks. But outdoors, winter can be harsh!

This morning's message is titled "Jesus, Our resurrection and life" and is based on John 11:1-57. This is a well known Bible story. The story is about Jesus, Mary, Martha and Lazarus and how Jesus raised him up from the dead. We have probably heard several sermons on this, have had Bible studies on this. I hope that today, this story is a reminder of what have learned before and hopefully, we will hear something anew that will bless and edify our lives.

But first let us pray:

Thank you, Father, for this time together. We have gather together in your name. We pray that you will take this time and use it to speak to us, to edify us and to help us to comform more and more like Jesus. To

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become more like Jesus everyday. With the Psalmist I pray, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14) Amen!

As I said earlier, this is a well known passage for Christians. It has theological truths that are foundational to the Christian faith. Just like the power of God in Jesus was revealing to Mary, Martha and their mourning friends, it is also revealing to us. We know how the story ends. Lazarus' sisters and friends did not. Theology, in order to be real, relevant, and life impacting and changing, must be derived from God's interaction with his creation.

The resurrection of Lazarus revealed to Mary, Martha and friends a great truth; that is, that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. It was a demonstration of the power of Jesus over death and that ironically, set in motion Jesus's own path to death on the cross. Lazarus was raised from death by the power of God in Jesus. The power of God raised Jesus from the dead.

The power of experiencing in us a living Jesus is crucial in the understanding, faith, and practice of the Christian faith. The Scriptures narrative is foundational for the Christian faith. In re-enacting those stories in our lives, they become our stories, our experiences with God in Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, and with the Word of God.

According to the gospels, Jesus, like you and I, had good friends. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were good friends of Jesus. They lived in Bethany, which was just a couple of miles from Jerusalem. And he visited them often. According to John, Mary was the one who had annointed Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.

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When Lazarus became sick, Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus saying, “Lord, he whom you love is sick”. They wanted Jesus to know it. We also note that the messages was not, Lord, he whom you love is sick, come quickly before he dies”. Jesus, on hearing this, said to his disciples, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”(John 11:4 NRSV). And he stayed for two more days.

But the time came when Jesus told his disciples that it was time to go to see Lazarus. The disciples knew that it was dangerous for Jesus and for them, to go to Judea. John says that the Jewish leaders were looking for him. This is the response of the disciples:

The disciples said to him,

“Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?”

and perhaps this explains Mary and Martha’s message to Jesus, “Lord the one whom you love is sick” and no call to come over quickly. They very likely knew how dangerous it was for Jesus to be in Judea and especially that close to Jerusalem.

But Jesus said,

Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then

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Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (Jn 11:9–16 NRSV)

Earlier in the gospel, Jesus had said

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12).

Believing in Jesus is walking in the light. Doubting Jesus, is walking in the dark. The metaphore works. We all know, when we are walking in a dark room, we can't see where we are going, we can't see if we are about to bump into something. But when we switch the light on, we can see where we are going and we walk with confidence. So it is for the Christian, when we walk in the light of Jesus, we have no fear of darkness because Jesus is the light of the world. The disciples were about to have their eyes opened to see Jesus as the life giver. Jesus is our resurrection and life.

I love Thomas' attitude:

"Let us also go, that we may die with him".

He heard what Jesus said, but he is not sure what Jesus meant, but one thing is for sure, he will go with Jesus, even if that means death to him.

When Jesus is near Bethany, Martha comes to meet him. She tells him, Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. This sounds like a recrimination, but I don't believe it was meant that way. Martha knew that Jesus was endangering his life there.

Martha continues,

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But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” (Jn 11:22–27 NRSV)

In her response, she says, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming to the world.

John 11:28-37 continues like this:

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

(Jn 11:28–37 NRSV)

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Jesus wanted to demonstrate to Martha, Mary and his disciples, what he meant when he said, ***“I am the resurrection and the life”***. They needed to see it at work. They needed to experience with their own eyes. Jesus was going to Jerusalem, and he would not come alive from there until after the resurrection, with a glorified body. But they needed to believe that the same Father, who in response to his prayer raised up Lazarus from the dead, Jesus himself was going to be raised from the dead by the power of God.

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

(Jn 11:38–44 NRSV)

And everyone saw what happened. We have known the story, so when we read it again, and our minds may wonder and skip to this part of the story, but remember that Martha, Mary and the disciples hadn't seen it and so, they didn't know if the dead would come out of the tomb. I think we all need those moments where we experience the

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power of God in our lives. This is a passage that can help us to experience God in our lives as well.

John wrote,

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

(Jn 20:30–31 NRSV)

So, this story is written for us too. Let us not in our minds, skip to the end when we read it. Rather, pay attention to the Scripture and read the conversations that took place. You know, in 11:33 says that Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. The original word in greek means that Jesus was upset, even angry and deeply moved.

Some say that Jesus was upset about their unbelief, but I think Jesus was upset about the human toll and cost that death takes on us. Death leaves us devastated, we may never heal from the loss. We may scar, but the hurt never goes away. Thanks be to God and to Jesus, in this passage, Jesus assured the people then and assures us even today that those who believe in him even though die, will live.

And we live because Jesus lives. Just like with Lazarus in the gospel of John, the daughter of Jairus that we read about in Mark 5:21-43 and the widow of Nain who was going to bury her son, but Jesus raised him from the dead in the gospel of Luke 7:11-17. Jesus raised them from the dead, Jesus will also raise us from the dead, from

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our illness from our death in our sins, God, in Jesus lifts us up and give us a new life.

Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says,

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Th 4:13–18.

All of this is possible only because God raised Jesus from the dead. And he has the power to raise us from the dead. Therefore, faced with death, mourning, and sorrow, we can have hope.

Many years ago, one of my brothers, who at that time was three years old, had a bad case of the whooping cough. Sometimes he would cough and cough until he went red in the face as he was choking to death for lack of oxygen. My parents took him to the local doctor in the evening, and he recommended to call an ambulance and take him to a Hospital in Guatemala City. He did not have the capacity to deal with

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my brothers severe case of the whooping cough. Guatemala City was about 3 to 4 hours away, not because of the distance, but because of the roads were so bad.

I remember hearing my parents talk about this and then decided to wait until the morning to make a decision. My brother was still coughing bad. The church came and held a prayer vigil and miraculously, my brother stopped coughing suddenly when they put him to bed. And he did not cough again as the church was praying. In the morning he had stopped coughing, they took him to the doctor, who examined him and said that he felt there was no need to take him to the hospital in Guatemala City. God had healed my brother and brought him back from the brink of death. He never cough the whooping cough again. He was healed.

That experience and that memory has been a big part of who I am as a Christian and as believer in Jesus as the Son of God and as our resurrection and our life.

We probably have different experiences. My experience doesn't have to be like yours or yours does have to be like mine, but I hope we all have seen the power of God manifested in our lives in different ways. How we have seen him bringing us back from being dead in our sins to be alive in Christ and rejoice in the new life that he has given to us. Maybe it is an addiction or anything that held you down and prisoner to fear and death but God has demonstrated in your life his power at work.

In all these things, God is glorified, just like in the resurrection of Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus and the son of widow of Nain, he received the glory.

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Jesus wanted his disciples to have a firm confidence and faith that in Jesus they had life. Mary, Martha, Lazarus and the disciples would soon be without Jesus and they had to have a strong faith, not only because what Jesus had taught them, but because of what Jesus had done in their sight.

They had seen Lazarus coming out of the tomb alive! That is powerful enough to keep them strong in the mist of persecution. When faced with disappointment, sickness and death, that feels like a cold harsh winter reality, they could hope and be renewed, like nature is renewed in spring, and like in Jesus we are renewed with hope in difficult times. In John 12:24 Jesus taught his disciples that unless a seed kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

If Jesus was able to raise Lazarus and others from death, he can lift you and me out from any adverse situations.

For John, raising Lazarus from the dead, precipitated the decision of the religious leaders to arrest and crucify Jesus.

Ironically, in his death and resurrection, we have life and we have hope.

May all the honor, power and glory be to him forever!

Amen!