

Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 2, 201
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Sermon Text: John 11:17-27, 38-45 (NIV)

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." 25) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26) and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27) "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ... 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, Lord," 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." 45) Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.**

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus;

I always find it challenging to buy greeting cards. I appreciate receiving them but sending them that's another story – it seems I can never find the right sentiments that I want to express. At times that has been especially true when it comes to picking out a sympathy card. Although the selections seem to vary, there are times when it seems that so many of the cards are so shallow in nature. The sentiments expressed in them are well meaning but somehow seemed to miss the mark – at this time of loss may the memories of your loved one fill you with peace says one card. While there is a sort of comfort to be gained by sharing memories – that's nothing that provides lasting comfort. In fact, those memories can just as easily cause a sense of loss and grief. Other cards express sentiments like this: May the love of those who are close to you bring you peace at this difficult time. Surely, it is wonderful to be surrounded by those who care about us when we've lost a loved one. Sooner or later those loved ones will all go home – then where does one turn for peace. I guess I might be a bit picky, but all I really wanted is a sympathy card that proclaims

Theme: Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life

1. He has come to comfort us in our grief
2. He has come to call us from death to life

The events surrounding this text are well known to us. So are the problems that Jesus came to solve – sin, sickness and death. Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus had become ill – his sisters, Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus. Although Jesus loved Lazarus and his family he didn't drop everything and run to be with them in this time of need. Instead he stayed where he was for two more days saying, **"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."**

When Jesus did finally decide to go to Bethany where his friends lived; it was after he knew that Lazarus had died. In fact, by the time he arrived there he had been in the grave for four days already as our text tells us. Jesus came to comfort this family in their grief with a comfort that only he could provide.

Many others had arrived ahead of Jesus – as our text informs us. Many Jews (from Jerusalem) had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. No doubt, Mary and Martha appreciated their

support and assistance. No doubt, they felt loved. No doubt, they shared many fond memories. Had anyone comforted them with the prospect of the resurrection and eternal life – it's certainly possible. We know that Martha had that hope in spite of her sorrow at the present time.

It's clear that at this time Martha (as well as Mary who is not mentioned in the verses we are considering today) were still grieving. They were still trying to put things into perspective when Jesus arrived.

"Lord," 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." 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."

Martha's brokenhearted condition is the result of the ugly harm that sin has brought into our world. We are all too familiar with situations like this, aren't we? Most of the adults have stood in front of the casket of a loved one, perhaps holding the hand or hugging a family member of the one who had fallen asleep in the Lord. And perhaps like Martha we've asked the same question of God, namely, "Why didn't he do something to stop this?" It's not necessarily unbelief. It's simply our grief stricken hearts trying to make sense of God's unknown but all wise ways.

In times of trouble Jesus comes to comfort us in our grief – no matter what the source of that trouble or grief may be. And so, even if you are young enough to have avoided the situation that confronted Martha you still have encountered some sort of trouble and grief that Jesus is able to help you with. Like Martha, we combine our expressions of trust with our expressions of frustration and our stumbling prayers seeking to understand God's will. At times, we don't know what to ask for and end up praying thoughts that echo Martha's prayer: **Dear Jesus, I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.**

Jesus does not disappoint us. He always has the perfect solution, the perfect answer, the perfect word of comfort. Jesus comforts us in our grief with his promises, with his love, with his power. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He has come to call us from death to life.

Martha had a wonderful head knowledge of the doctrine of the resurrection. She was confident that such a resurrection would take place and that her brother would be a part of it. It was up to Jesus to help Martha see the relevance of that doctrine to her present situation.

He is life and he gives life to those who believe in him. Jesus' promise of life is not merely a promise of a resurrection to eternal life on the last day, although that is certainly included. Let's take a closer look at Jesus' words.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26) and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

First of all this is a very personal promise – the one who believes in Jesus is the one who will live even though they die. Then this is also a general promise – whoever or all who live and believe will never die.

Now just what does Jesus mean when he talks about never dying? It's clear that he's not speaking about physical death – because Lazarus had died physically and Jesus acknowledges that even those who believe and live in him will die physically. When Jesus says that those who live and believe will never die he's saying that the life that he provides will never end.

The life he provides begins now and continues forever. The life Jesus provides is Spiritual life – life with him, life with God! That’s a life that is created by the Gospel.

This is the life Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman at the well when he promised to give her living water: (John 4:14) **“But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”**

It’s life in which we are connected to Christ who enables us to bear fruit. (John 15:5) **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”**

This is a part of the comfort that Jesus brings when he comes to comfort us in our grief. He comforts us with his presence, with new life, with a connection to God and his blessings including the blessing of calling us from death to life.

Secondly, Jesus wants us to apply these promises to ourselves. He asks each of us. Do you believe this? Are you willing to enjoy the life that I offer you? Are you willing to take me at my word?

Jesus called you to life with his word and sacrament. You have new life. He will never leave you or forsake you. As your Good Shepherd he knows your needs and well provides you.

The LORD is your shepherd, you shall not be in want. 2) He makes you lie down in green pastures, he leads you beside quiet waters, 3) he restores your soul. He guides you in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4) Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need fear no evil, for he is with you; his rod and his staff, they comfort you. 5) He prepares a table before you in the presence of your enemies. He anoints your head with oil; your cup overflows. 6) Surely goodness and love will follow you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

That’s what Jesus is saying to you in this text when he talks about those who live and believe in him never dying. And then he asks, do you believe this?

At times of grief or sorrow or those times of difficulty which the Lord allows to enter into our lives it’s not always so easy to know how to answer that question. Here’s where we can learn a lesson from Martha. Her confession is one we can make when we are face to face with grief. It’s a confession we can make when we are face to face with the grave of a loved one. It’s a confession we can make as death comes knocking on our door. "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

And here’s where we can also watch Jesus as he goes into action to strengthen Martha’s faith and ours. **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, Lord," 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 believed, you would 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." 45) Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.**

The whole situation had touched Jesus – it's as if Jesus was sick and tired of death and how it tears at the whole human race. That's our Savior – the one who understands our needs because he was one of us. The one who is willing to go into action for us.

When Jesus wanted to go into action to show that he is indeed life Martha balked. But Jesus assured her that any unpleasantness they experienced by removing the stone which sealed the grave of Lazarus for 4 days would be worth the display of his glory. He had to raise Lazarus as evidence that he himself would conquer death.

Once the stone had been removed, Jesus offered a prayer to his heavenly Father expressing his confidence in him. Then he calls out, Lazarus, come out! And the dead man walked out of the tomb grave cloths and all! Here we see a foreshadowing of the resurrection of our loved ones as well as our own resurrection. Jesus has called us to life from spiritual death and separation from God with his word. And with his word Jesus will call us from physical death to eternal life with him in heaven.

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Amen.