

## **I Am the Resurrection and the Life**

**May 19, 2019**

Today we continue the sermon series on the “I am..” statements of Jesus from the gospel of John. We began last week with Jesus telling us “I am the Good Shepherd” and “I am the gate for the sheep.” This morning I am going to look at a double “I am” when Jesus said that he is both the resurrection and the life. It takes place in the very middle of the 11th chapter of the gospel of John. I would read it, but it’s a long story and it really doesn’t make sense without the whole story, so I’m going to tell it to you instead.

You can turn to John 11 if you want to follow along. It begins with a report that Lazarus, a resident of Bethany (just outside of Jerusalem), is ill. He is a friend of Jesus and the brother of Mary and Martha. They send a message to Jesus, who is “across the Jordan” and far away from Bethany, telling him that the one he loves is ill. Even though Jesus knows that his friend is very sick, he doesn’t go to him right away. Instead he stays where he is for a couple of more days. Then, after two days have passed, Jesus decides to go to Judea. His disciples warn him that it is dangerous for Jesus to go there because the Jewish leaders are already seeking to kill him and in fact had tried to stone him last time he was there. But Jesus doesn’t heed their warning and they go anyway. Thomas, who will soon become known as “Doubting Thomas” shows no doubt here as he expresses his willingness to go “even though we may die with him”

When they arrive in Bethany, they find that they are too late. Lazarus has died and he has been buried for four days. But the mourning continues. Many people had come to Bethany to console Mary and Martha over the death of their brother. Among the crowd of mourners, Martha hears that Jesus had (FINALLY) come and she goes out to meet him. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Her reaction to Jesus’ absence is something that we can all relate to. We have all wondered where Jesus is when things get difficult- when we are struggling or scared or mourning or grieving. We all have said “Lord if you had been here...”

Then, after Martha calms down some and recognizes that she knows Jesus will eventually raise Lazarus, Jesus tells her what we are most interested in- he says “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?” Martha answers affirmatively. And we know the rest of the story. Jesus goes to Lazarus’ tomb and calls for him to “come out”. Lazarus does. He who was once dead is alive again. And Jesus is in big trouble. He has attracted even more attention from the Jewish leaders. Now they want to eliminate both him and Lazarus.

This is the pivotal moment in the gospel of John. It is when Jesus goes from being a minor irritant to the religious and political establishment, to being a major threat to their power and influence. From here on the story moves rapidly to its climax and conclusion. Where Jesus proves the truth of his words to Martha, that he is indeed the resurrection and the life as he dies on the cross and rises from the grave. But even though we know the rest of Jesus’ story, we don’t know what happens to Lazarus after Jesus raises him from the dead. The scriptures are silent as to his fate. We don’t know if the Jews succeed in killing him again, or if he lives a long and happy life. For even though Jesus raised Lazarus from death, that was only a temporary solution.

But the fate of Lazarus isn’t really the point. This account is less about his fate and more about the faith of others. Like Thomas, who is willing to go with Jesus even though they may die. And the faith of Mary and Martha. They had enough faith in Jesus to believe that he could help their brother. That is why they call on him to come when Lazarus is ill. They know that Jesus can do something about it. And even when Jesus delays, they still have faith. Even though Martha lets Jesus know her displeasure in his delay “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” she tells him. She knows that Jesus can still do something about it. “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

We love to hear Jesus say “I am the resurrection and the life” but I don’t think that we like to acknowledge that for us to experience Jesus as the resurrection and the life we must first experience death. We want the resurrection but not the death.

Martha knows that Jesus can bring life out of death. Even though the situation was not what she had hoped it would be, even though her brother was dead and buried, she knew that Jesus could provide her with hope. Aren't we the same? We all have suffered like Mary and Martha suffered. We have lost those we love, we have lost the people and the things that are important to us. We have called to Jesus to help us yet it has seemed that our calls may go unanswered.

But Jesus shows up. He always shows up. Even though it seemed too late, Jesus showed up. He raised Lazarus from the dead, he brings life out of death. He is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in him will live, even though they die. We love to hear that story. We love to hear about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. But when we hear Jesus say to us "I am the resurrection and the life" we aren't hearing about a resurrection like the one Lazarus experienced. That was an earthly, and as we noted, a temporary solution.

The resurrection and life that Jesus is, it is a resurrection to an eternal life. It is a resurrection to a new life. Through Jesus, we will be raised from death and we will live. It doesn't mean that we aren't going to die. To experience resurrection we have to first experience death. What Jesus is saying when he says "I am the resurrection and the life" is that death, which was thought to have the final say for everyone, no matter who and no matter what, no longer has that power. The life that Jesus brings is greater than the death that we will experience.