

ARE YOU A BELIEVER?

John 11:1-45 Text: vs. 25 *“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*”

The poet Shelley wrote *“Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”* In other words, death affects us all. And at certain moments in life, it attracts a lot of attention. The assassination of John F. Kennedy. His brother Robert. The death of Princess Diana. Their deaths led to worldwide mourning. And when your loved ones die, you want others to know *“A good person has died! Don’t you care?”* Death is the ultimate! You can’t escape your mortality! And you can’t escape grief. It’s all around you.

Grief will come when you least expect it. You get awful news! You go into shock. You try to deny it. *“No, it can’t be happening!”* You cry. You may scream. You’re an emotional mess because your world has suddenly fallen apart. Then after a while, you begin to deal with the tragedy of death. Anger may arise toward a drunk driver. Or the hospital team you feel could have done more. You’re angry at yourself. Even God. Why did He let this happen? There may be guilt. You feel you could have done more! Deep depression. Overwhelming sadness. But after a time, you begin rebuilding your life.

And in our lesson today, Jesus spoke about His own death and resurrection as confidently as He did on the day, He raised Lazarus from the dead. Repeatedly, Jesus had told His disciples of His death and resurrection. He said it plainly. He said it matter-of-factly. There was no doubt in His mind He would rise from the dead. And when Martha saw Jesus coming, she said, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* And *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”* *Martha answered, “I know he will rise again - in the resurrection - at the last day”* Martha didn’t realize the power, the glory, and the absolute majesty of the Man standing before her that day. He had told Martha *“I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that believes and lives in Me shall never die. Martha, your brother will rise again”* but she didn’t get what Jesus had told her. So, she ran to tell her sister Mary, who jumped up and ran out the door to meet Jesus. When she got to Jesus, she fell at His feet and said, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* Jesus asked, *“Where have you laid him?”* *“Come and see, Lord”* she said.

Jesus wept.

The Jews said, *“See how He loved him!”* But some said, *“Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”* Then, they all went to the tomb of Lazarus. It was a cave. It had a stone rolled across its entrance. Jesus said, *“Take away the stone.”* Martha said, *“But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor. He has been there four days.”* Jesus said, *“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”* So, they took away the stone. Jesus looked up to heaven and said, *“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear Me. And I say this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me.”* Then He called in a loud voice, *“Lazarus, come out!”* And Lazarus came out of the tomb - Alive! His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen. A cloth was around his face. Jesus said, *“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”*

His voice was the Voice that spoke the worlds into existence. His voice was the Voice that had hung the stars in the sky. His voice was the Voice that shook heaven, and earth, and hell with the power of His command! Now, by His creative power, it was possible for Lazarus to come forth from his tomb - Alive! And God speaks with that same power to every hopeless situation. To every hopeless individual. To every hopeless circumstance. And when He does speak, it brings life. It brings victory! Like Lazarus, you can come out of your life of sin. You can be released from your chains of sin. The covering from your eyes that has kept you in darkness will be removed when Jesus says to you, as He did to Lazarus, *“Loose him. Let him go!”* When you come to Jesus, believing He is the Resurrection and the Life, confessing your sin, believing in His sovereign power, and placing your trust to him, Jesus will release you from your sin! He will set you free! There’s Hope for the Hopeless! And it’s the greatest of Hopes! It’s the only Hope for you.

Max Lucado, pastor, speaker, and best-selling author told the story of a missionary in Brazil who had discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote part of the jungle living near a river. The tribe needed medical attention. A contagious disease was destroying the population. People were dying daily. A hospital was not too far away. But it was across the river. Those Indians would not cross that river because they believed it was inhabited by evil spirits. To enter the water meant certain death. The missionary explained to them that he had crossed that river and was unharmed. They weren’t impressed. Then he led them over to the bank of the river and placed his hand in the water. They still wouldn’t go in. He walked up to his waist into the water. He splashed water on his face. It didn’t matter. They were still afraid to enter the river. Finally, he dove into the river and swam beneath the surface until he had crossed the river and came up on the other side. Coming out of the river he punched a triumphant fist into the air. He had entered the water. And escaped! That’s when the Indians broke out into a cheer and followed him across the river.

That's what Jesus did! He told the people they need not fear death. But they wouldn't believe Him until He entered the *river of death* and came out on the other side. That's what Jesus did! He entered His *river of death* on the Cross and won the victory by coming out of His grave *alive!* And on your resurrection morning, with the same authority, and with the same confidence that brought Jesus back to life, He brought His good friend Lazarus back to life. One day, God will look down from heaven and say to you, "*Come my love! The grave no longer has a hold on you. No more of death's sting! No more suffering! Arise!*"

Because Jesus has given you the Power of His Resurrection! Death makes a difference in life. A tragic death makes a huge change in life. But with Jesus at the center of your life, you can go forward. The loss of a loved one certainly tests your faith. There may be a time when you don't want to talk to God. But hold onto Him. He is your resurrection and your life. One commentator has said, *apart from trust in God, the world is a cemetery.* But God sent in Jesus into the world to give you the opportunity to pass from this life into life eternal. Just as the crowds wanted bread, Jesus offered them living bread. Here, Mary and Martha wanted their brother returned, and they got him! God sent Jesus to them with the offer of their brother's resurrection to life.

And you have the same offer! The community of baptized believers, the church, is by no means a group of death deniers. We are aware of death in the world around us. We know that one day we, too, will experience physical death. Yet, faith in Jesus is the entrance into life beyond death. Not only at the end of life. But right now! Eternal life awaits you. It begins right here, right now, when you place your faith in Christ. When you put your life in Him, the Spirit of life takes root within you, and "*He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal body also, through His Spirit who dwells in you.*" (Romans 8:11) Have you met the source of all Life? Do you have a real relationship with Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master? If not, you can have it right now by looking to Jesus and believing in Him as your Resurrection and Life. He will set you free! You may not know where you are today in your own journey through this life. But God wants to meet you wherever you are today.

The Resurrection should connect the dots for you. You're no longer on the outside looking in. The Resurrection connects the dots, because by the Resurrection, Jesus is not just a Prophet, a Priest, and a King. He is Lord of All. He is Conqueror over sin and death and hell. He is the only way to the Father. If you come to Him by faith, He will receive you gladly. Because in the Resurrection there power in the midst of your failure. There is hope, no matter what the darkest situation of life may be. And because Jesus is the Resurrection, He has a plan for your life if you will look His way and trust Him with your life, both now, and forevermore. And as He said to Lazarus, He will say to you, "*Loose him. Let him go!*"
AMEN