

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

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Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Brian Lee, and my family and I are part of the Alameda Community Group.

The Lord's word for us this morning comes from the Gospel according to John, chapter 11, verses 17 to 53. On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again.

[1 : 23] Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. 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?

Yes, Lord, she replied. I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world. After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside.

The teacher is here, she said, and is asking for you. When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

[2 : 25] When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him? he asked.

Come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. Then 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?

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 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. Then Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?

[3 : 32] So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 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. When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

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.

So from that day on, they plotted to take his life. This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Good morning, Christ Church.

Thank you so much, Brian. If you're new with us, on November 14th, we commended Isaac, Brian, and Seung-yoon's son into the Lord's hands as he passed from this world into the world to come.

[4 : 38] And our hearts just broke that Sunday morning. And I threw the sermon that I had prepared into the trash. And we just stumbled our way through this text about the death of Jesus' friend.

And so we love you guys. And it's not often you get to preach the same text twice in a year. Fortunately, this one is a rich one.

And I hope I can bring something fresh and helpful to you today. It's the first Sunday in Lent. And those Ash Wednesday words, those sober words, ring especially true these days.

Remember that you're dust, and to the dust you shall return. There's nothing like a once-in-a-hundred-year killer virus to remind us of our frailty, where it's felt at times like nature itself is trying to destroy us.

And then there's nothing like, you know, national vitriol just spewing and internationally rockets launching to make us conclude that if nature can't kill us, then we certainly are capable of doing it ourselves.

[5 : 46] And, you know, there's one place. Sorry, this thing doesn't want to fit my ear this morning. I don't know what happened to my ear. But there's one place I know to go and find big-picture help in our dust-to-dust reality of our lives and of this world, and that's the Bible.

But as we open the Bible, I remember a book that I opened a few years ago by a philosopher named Luke Ferry. He's a professor of philosophy at the University of Paris, and he served as the French minister of national education.

And he wrote this book called A Brief History of Thought, A Philosophical Guide to Living. And this is what Luke Ferry says. He says, When I was a student in 1968, when religious questions were not the most fashionable, we basically ignored, lumped together, and cheerfully channel-hopped our way through the great monotheistic religions.

It was possible to pass our exams and even become a philosophy professor by knowing next to nothing about Judaism, Islam, or Christianity. As a result, for years, I knew more or less nothing about the intellectual history of Christianity beyond the cultural commonplaces.

And Ferry says, This strikes me as absurd, and I would not wish you to repeat the mistake. Even if one is not a believer, and all the more so if one is hostile to religion, we have no right to ignorance.

[7 : 15] If only we oppose it, we must at least be familiar with religion and its various forms and understand what we are opposing. There is not a museum of art or even of contemporary art which does not require a minimum of theological understanding if one is to fully understand its contents.

That's a striking quote to me because as we think about the universal aspirations of humankind, the kind of stuff philosophers work on, the search for identity, the quest for meaning, the sense of guilt, longing for freedom, the hunger for love, the instinct to worship, the dread of death, and the desire to survive, I would argue that Jesus corresponds rather wonderfully and beautifully to these deep and universal human aspirations.

And so I agree with Luke Ferry that it's strange and rather shocking that Jesus would be so studiously ignored by philosophers and by the educated elites of the Western world.

Think about it. We have more evidence about Jesus than all the great figures of ancient history, and part of that evidence is the Gospel of John and the story of Lazarus.

And when you think about all the great heroes of history, how many of them have stood in a cemetery and with the power of a word raised a human being from death to life?

[8 : 45] Now, if that happened and we have strong evidence and tough-minded reasons to believe that it did happen, wouldn't we want to know more about this person, who they are, what they came to do, what their philosophy of life is all about?

And shouldn't that have some bearing on our philosophy of life and our approach to how we're going to live it? So what I want to say this morning from John 11 is that Jesus gives us tombstone truth, graveside grace, and primal power.

I just want to walk us through each one of those. Jesus gives us tombstone truth, graveside grace, and primal power. First of all, Jesus gives us tombstone truth.

Look at verse 21. Lord, Martha said to Jesus, If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.

And Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again. And Martha answered, I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. These are orthodox doctrines of Scripture.

[10 : 00] That God is all-powerful, that nothing's impossible for him, that he listens to the prayers of the righteous, that at the end of history, God will raise his covenant people to new life.

That's sturdy biblical theology that gives us hope in the hardest times. And though it's true, it's kind of cold comfort to grieving Martha.

And so Jesus gives an even deeper comfort to her with what are perhaps some of his most famous words in verse 25. He says, I am the resurrection and the life.

Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this? Jesus, when he says, I am the resurrection, he's claiming to be the Lord of our physical death.

If you're trusting in me, he says, even though you die, you will live. Now, you'll not escape the experience of death, but you will survive it. You'll live with God in a disembodied state temporarily.

[11 : 06] And then as the scriptures teach, when Jesus comes again on the last day, you will be raised up. You will be re-embodied with him and like him with a new resurrection body like Jesus' body that has unimaginable powers.

So though your body now is weak and fragile and mortal, your new body will be immune from pain and disease and fatigue and shame and age and death because that body will be free finally of sin.

So Jesus says, I am the resurrection. You don't need to look to a future event. You need to look to the present person with you now. Now, the resurrection is not so much a distant hope as it is God in the flesh talking to you.

Jesus is saying, I've come to win a victory. I've come to triumph and conquer over death. And so it follows logically that my beloved believers, for them, death will not be the last word.

You guys tracking with me? I need like an amen or I need, I can't keep preaching the sermon. This is like not a monologue here.

[12 : 22] Yes, you are going to share in the shock and the scandal and the sadness of death, but for you, your final state will be the reversal of the reality of physical dissolution.

So don't look to the future for your hope. Look to me right now for I am the resurrection and I have come to bring people from death to life.

The resurrection is not a doctrine. The resurrection has a living face and a name. It's Jesus. I'm the resurrection. That's a claim to be the Lord over physical death.

And when he says, I am the life, that is a claim to be the Lord over spiritual death. Jesus says in verse 26, I'm the life and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Or as one translator says, they will never ever die an eternal death. For all people are born under the judgment of God for our sins. We arrive at life already in a state of death, alienated from God, separated from the God of life under his just condemnation.

[13 : 26] But Jesus says, when we experience him who is life with a capital L, we will come alive. That as he taught Nicodemus, we will be born again from above, that the Holy Spirit will come down and bring the divine, eternal life of God into us.

That Jesus, who is the life by the Holy Spirit, will bring us into the fellowship of love with his Father. And if that's true of you, if you're in this circle of life and love with God, you can never die a spiritual death.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God. If you have this real, true, deep experience of life in Christ, your moment of physical death will not even be a blip.

This life will be so strong, so full, so rich, so indestructible that in comparison with your physical death, it will be trivial. You will simply go straight from living with Christ in this world to a more intensified form of life with him in the world to come, which the scriptures tell us is better by far.

Jesus has been building up to this through the whole gospel. And we heard him say in John chapter 5, verse 24, he says, very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, not will have eternal life, but has, as a present, authentic experience, you have eternal life now, and you will not be judged because you crossed over from death to life.

[15 : 11] And Jesus goes on, he says, very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

We heard him say a couple weeks ago in John chapter 8, very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death. And Jesus is going to go on in his great high priestly prayer in John 17, he's going to pray this.

He's going to say, now this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Eternal life is not a thing, it's not an object that you possess.

Eternal life is a person, it's a relationship, it's an experience that you enter into. And Jesus, I have to say, he's pretty excited about not only life after death but life before death right now.

He's come and he's come to deal with the problem of life and its meaninglessness and he's also come to deal with the problem of death and its certainty.

[16 : 17] And that's why he says, I am both the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this? Do you believe that? That's the question that he asked and we're going to come to Martha's answer in a little bit.

But this is, this is just good tombstone truth and you're going to need it. You're going to need it because you're all going to stand at a tombstone. And so Jesus gives us not only tombstone truth but he also gives us graveside grace.

He gives us not just tombstone truth but graveside grace. I was with one of my New Testament professors last week, Reggie Kidd and we were talking by the fire drinking some strong beverages talking about how much we love the gospel of John because in it we get this high divinity of Jesus but also this deep humanity of Jesus.

Jesus is the word of God who made the world but he also has the longest and deepest conversations and dialogues with people whom he radically is transforming.

And John 11 is no different. Here we see Jesus' divine power and his great humanity. Look with me at the end of the story where Jesus says in verse 43 called out in a loud voice Lazarus come out and the dead man came out.

[17 : 44] Now that's a power beyond human imagining. We can put a man on the moon but can we call the dead out of a grave? Of the greatest achievements of the 20th century Jesus' achievement in the first century was even greater I have to say.

We get this amazing description of divine power here but alongside it we get this lovely description of humanity. Jesus is close with this family.

It says that he had great affection for them. He loved Martha. He loved Mary. He loved Lazarus. When they saw him weeping over his friend they said see how see how he loved him.

This was his home base his spiritual family that he had adopted when he'd come down to Jerusalem this is where he would be with this family. And alongside of his divine power we see a deep sympathy that Jesus has with those he calls friends especially when they're going through a family tragedy we see Jesus weep with those who weep.

We get here a picture of the supernatural power that separates Jesus from us because we can't do that we can't stand in a graveyard and call people to come out but we also get here a picture of a human sympathy from Jesus that draws us close to him and if in his divinity he does for us what we cannot do for ourselves in his humanity he sets for us a pattern of what we ought to be like in our life and in our experience and look at what he does with these two sisters Martha and Mary in their different personalities and their drastically different needs we read in verse 32 that when Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him she fell at his feet and said Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died the same statement as Martha they must have been saying it to one another for days all week long if only the Lord were here but Mary in contrast she doesn't want to talk theology she doesn't want to talk the truth with Jesus she's so stricken with grief that all she can do is throw herself down on the ground at his feet and some of us know what that means some of us know what it means to be so sad and so broken that all you can do is just crumble up in a pile and in a puddle of tears but look at verse 35 kids this is a great one if your parents want you to do some scripture memory

[20 : 28] I recommend starting here what does it say it says Jesus wept my son Walter was reflecting on this verse a few weeks ago he said dad isn't it amazing that the most powerful person in the universe cries like us and that he cries with us it is amazing it's amazing that he shares our tears and what's amazing is that he's deeply moved and troubled with us in verse 33 it says that when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled we could also interpret that that he was outraged and grief stricken and if you know anything about bereavement you know that tears and anger often flow together Jesus I think is outraged why because is he seeing the raw havoc that suffering and sin wreak on our lives as we encounter death is Jesus looking down the corridors of time looking down through the centuries at all the tombs and all the funerals of all of his beloved people unable to hold back his tears as he sees his loved ones losing their loved ones

I think Jesus is outraged in this moment because he sees all the tears of Christian people and he knows that the turmoil and the bitterness that's in the heart of this family at this particular graveside is going to be repeated countless numbers of times through Christian history and that question of verse 37 is going to be asked over and over again Lord where were you if only you had been here my loved one would not have died and Jesus knows that in the future he will not do what he's going to do for Lazarus in each case that despite the fact that he wins the victory over death at Easter death will continue to cause us intense grief and so he's outraged and he's grief stricken at the prospect of this pattern repeating itself down the ages so friends

I hope you can see here that John 11's tombstone truth assures us of Jesus power over physical and spiritual death but it also assures us of Jesus love it assures us that he is in fact the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows and if Jesus is the pattern for our humanity then we too are to bear one another's grief and we too are to carry one another's sorrows and to weep with those who weep in fact I would say that our visits and the tears of Christians are one of the major ways the world can experience God today amen so Jesus gives us tombstone truth and graveside grace but finally he also gives us primal power the prologue of this gospel we learn that Jesus came from the father full of grace and truth but he doesn't just tell us he's full of grace and truth he gives us a visual aid in verse 39 we read 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 now I love the old King James version because Martha says there but lord he stinketh he stinketh and that just tips me off that the gospel is about turning tragedy into comedy right lord he stinketh and Jesus says well did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God and then down in verse 43 he called out in a loud voice Lazarus come out and the dead man came out his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face and Jesus said to them take off the grave clothes and let him go now this is a heart stopping glorious moment because an immovable object meets with an irresistible force death meets Christ and Christ conquers this is a power that should drive us to awe and thanks and hope this is a power that should be the center of our philosophy of life now if you think about it there are most likely other newly buried people in this tomb and so it's a good thing that Jesus said the name

Lazarus otherwise many people would have come out Jesus would have been like no Kevin I'm sorry not you not now at least but there is a kind of miracle within a miracle here that Lazarus comes stumbling out somehow wrapped up in his burial clothes I mean we don't know really how he did that Jesus doesn't bring him out in pristine condition he gets his friends involved and I think that's a little picture of the mission of the church he says to his disciples around him take off the grave clothes and let him go free and that's really kind of our job with each other you're not dead anymore you're alive you need to go free and walk and follow Jesus but how did Jesus reveal the glory of God how did he life out of death we're told in the story that he did it through prayer verse 41 then Jesus looked up and said father I thank you that you have heard me

[26 : 44] I knew that you always hear me Jesus I think invites us to pray like him to look up to open our eyes to talk straight to our father in heaven to say thank you so much for hearing us and he invites us to pray and ask God to hold at bay the forces of death and to cause life to triumph over death and we should try to pray this way we should try to pray like Jesus for the war in Ukraine for strained marriages for troubled youth for broken hearts for gospel breakthrough we should ask God would you let life triumph over death and Jesus when he thanks his father for hearing his prayer he's referring to the fact that he's been praying for Lazarus for days for days before he even got to this prayer he's been praying that though he die he'd be preserved from corruption that his body in the tomb would be whole and complete that he'd be ready to be summoned back to life and Jesus prayers are powerful and we're told in the new testament that Jesus prays for us

Jesus is praying right now from the throne of God and the power of the Holy Spirit for you by name in all the circumstances that you're going through and that should give us incredible confidence for our lives today it should also give us incredible confidence for our future that one day Jesus prayers are going to be answered and he is going to say Jonathan Barry St.

Claire come out and that's exactly what I'm going to do so if that's what's going to happen why am I afraid what do I have to be afraid of now notice as we close that Lazarus is not given a body like Jesus resurrection body Jesus does not come out of his tomb bound hand and foot his resurrection body is so powerful that we're told in the end of this gospel that he just passed through his grave clothes Jesus just passed through his tombstone right that wasn't moved for Jesus to get out it was moved for us to get in and see that the tomb was empty Jesus has gone through death and out the other side into a life that can never die into an indestructible life but Lazarus merely comes back to ordinary human life the process of death has been reversed for him and he's not given a new body which I imagine caused him to feel a little bit ambivalent on this day yes I'm glad to be welcomed back by my sisters yes I am glad that

Jesus used me to convince the world that he's the son of God but I gotta say I'm a little bummed I'm a little bummed to be leaving the joys of heaven behind I'm a little bummed that I gotta come and face disease and dying all over again I'm a little bummed because it's bad enough to die once right for most of us one funeral is sufficient that's all I want why does Jesus go through the trouble with his friend Lazarus why does he bother with this because we're told in verse 53 from that day on they plotted to take his life Jesus I think conspires with his friend Lazarus and he knows that this is going to be the triggering event he knows that if he goes to war with death Jesus is signing his own death warrant no one's gonna want me around anymore this is too much power this threatens the powers that be if I bring

Lazarus out I'm essentially burying myself if Lazarus is raised I'm gonna sink if Lazarus lives then I have to die but Jesus is joyfully going to die why because he knows that the resurrection and the life must die if he's going to destroy the power that death holds over us Jesus is going to have to go into death and dismantle it from the inside and so the immortal God in the flesh joyfully walks into the jaws of death on the cross for you and for me to give us life life to the full life abundant life everlasting life that can never die do you believe this that's the question that

[31 : 43] Jesus asked to Martha do you do you believe this and John tells us at the end of his gospel he says in John 20 that Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book but these signs are written this sign of Lazarus was written down as the seventh and climactic of the great signs in this gospel it was written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name do you believe Martha says in verse 27 yes Lord I believe that you are the Messiah the Son of God who was to come into the world on the lips of this woman in a culture by the way that hadn't been revolutionized by Jesus yet they hadn't learned from Jesus how to value women yet on the lips of this woman comes the highest confession of faith in the gospel three amazing affirmations about

Jesus person that you're the Messiah you're the Son of God and you're the one who was to come to bring life to this world Martha brings together objective intellectual conviction with subjective personal commitment believing in the person of Jesus trusting in the work of Jesus she said yes Lord I believe do we believe do we believe in this Jesus who brings tombstone truth who brings graveside grace and who brings us even now and especially on the last day primal power to bring the dead back to life may God help me believe may he help you believe in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen