

April 6, 2014
Lent 5

"The Amazing Miracle of Lazarus' Resurrection"

JOHN 11:17-27, 38-45

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹ "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." 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." ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 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.

Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." Even though we will die, we will live because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. This is the great hope of the Christian faith.

The Greek word for resurrection is the amazing word "anastasis" which is a combination the word for stand and the word for again. When people die they are lying down in a flat horizontal position. In the resurrection they are raised up to stand again. We firmly believe with full confidence that our bodies that will lie down in death will be raised up again in glory when Jesus returns on the last day.

It is no secret. All of us sitting here this morning will face death. You might get away without paying all your taxes but you will not get away from death. We will die. People we love will die. There is a way to escape death. This is not a secret to you dear Christian. Your Lord Jesus holds the keys to death. He is the only one who can raise you to life again and reunite you with your loved ones who died believing in him.

This morning we have the great privilege of standing in front of the tomb of a dead man named Lazarus. We see Jesus approach the tomb and shout "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus stumbles out of the grave not because he has a hard time walking but because of strips of linen cloth still wrapped his arms and legs and body. It's an amazing miracle of the resurrection that helps us appreciate the miracle of the resurrection that will take place some day when Jesus raises our bodies back to life again.

You cannot escape dying

It is sad to see someone we love die. John 11 begins with the sad news that a man named Lazarus was sick. Lazarus was a brother to Mary and Martha. They lived in the village of Bethany which was a little over a mile from Jerusalem. Often they opened their home to Jesus and his disciples whenever they came to Jerusalem. It appears they were quite wealthy. Mary was able to afford buying an expensive alabaster jar of pure nard worth almost a year's worth of wages which she used to anoint the feet of Jesus. They had lots of friends.

Lots of money and lots of friends could not help their brother with his serious illness, so Mary and Martha sent messengers to deliver the sad news to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." Jesus does not drop everything and rush to their side. He tells his concerned disciples that the sickness would not end in death. Jesus knew he would raise Lazarus to life again to bring glory to God and fill people all over the world like you and me with the hope of the resurrection.

It is hard to see people we love slowly dying. In those days they did not have the antibiotics we have today to fight off life threatening infections. Even today the best medicines, and the best health foods, and the best health care money can buy may slow the process of dying, but eventually everyone will go through the valley of the shadow of death. There are those that go through this dark valley with Jesus, and those who go through this dark valley without Jesus. Mary and Martha and Lazarus went through the doors of death with Jesus as their shepherd.

After four days, Jesus finally arrives from the Jordan Valley at the home of Mary and Martha. It says, "On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days." Lazarus was not alone when he died. He had his sisters at his side. He had sisters who believed Jesus was their Messiah. They knew Jesus would suffer and die on the cross when he went up to Jerusalem because Jesus told them. That's why Mary anointed Jesus with that expensive perfume as Jesus said, "She did this to prepare me for my burial." They knew Jesus would raise their brother to life again on the last day and they would see him again.

When Jesus finally arrives Martha goes out to meet him. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." She is not upset with Jesus because he waited so long to come and see them. She knows Jesus had the power to keep her brother from dying. She leaves everything in his all knowing and all loving hands. When Job lost his ten children, then his wealth, and then his health, he was given the strength to confess his confidence in his Lord and Savior just as Martha did with the words, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be

the name of the Lord." We think of the hymn verse that says, "I leave all things to God's direction; He loves me both in wealth and woe...My fortress and my rock is he. What pleases God that pleases me."

When I die someday, I want to be surrounded by people who love me and care about me, and have a solid, sure and firm hope in Jesus and his power over death. Martha had such hope. "Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." She confesses, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to be like Mary and Martha to spend some time with my parents shortly before the Lord called them home to heaven. Did Mary and Martha say the 23rd psalm with their brother as I did with my parents? Did they sing hymns with their brother as I was able to do with my parents and along with other family members who gathered around them? Did they talk to their brother about Jesus and the hope of the resurrection as I was able to do with my parents? The best moment I ever had with my dad in my whole life occurred as I said goodbye to him for the last time. My final words were, "Dad, you know how much you loved the redwoods of California? Jesus has an even more beautiful place prepared for us and we are going to go for long walks when he raises us to life again. The loving father spoke to his loving son, "We won't just walk we will glide along." So we live our lives and die in the hope of the resurrection as Mary, and Martha and Lazarus did.

You can escape death

While we cannot escape the ugly process of dying, we can escape death because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life." He says, "I am your hope of standing up again on the last day." The night of his resurrection from the dead, Jesus showed the disciples the nail prints in his hands. With their physical eyes they saw the proof that he had risen from dead. With the eyes of faith we look at Jesus' resurrection body and believe that someday he will raise us to life again with glorified bodies. Philippians says, "He will transform our lowly bodies so they will be like his glorious body." In the darkest hours of his life, Job was able to confess his hope of the resurrection with these words that are heard at almost every Christian funeral, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God."

Jesus asks Martha "Do you believe this?" Martha says, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world." Martha did have her weak moments when serving a good meal became more important than sitting with her sister Mary and listening to Jesus. Jesus had to warn her about being too worried and upset about many things." Now her faith shines brightly. She believes Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. He is the one God chose from all eternity to do everything necessary to save us and rescue us and raise us to life again.

Because Jesus is the Christ, we share the same hope that Martha had. The Old Testament predicted the Christ would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.

I can find nothing in my own resources or power that can eradicate one sin in my life. Last week I came across this verse from Psalm 7 that shows us how much we need Jesus our Messiah, our Lord, our Savior, the Christ of God. "He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made." The holes you dig and the pits you dig are deep. There is no escape from sin except through Jesus. If even one small sin was still left unpaid by Jesus, we could never have this hope of being raised to life again on the last day.

Jesus goes to the tomb of his dear friend. Jesus is deeply moved. A moment before he wept. In front of all the people he cried genuine tears of sorrow for the friends he loved. It's OK to cry tears over the death of someone you love. When you lose someone you love, no one knows your sorrow better than Jesus. "What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear." You have heard the expression, "A friend in need, is a friend indeed." Jesus is indeed our friend. He is also our friend in deed. Let's make that two words. He has the power to raise us to life again and raise up the people we love. Romans 5 says, "Death reigns through Adam but life reigns through Christ.

Jesus calls for the stone to be removed. Martha intervenes. Jesus-loving, faith-shining, resurrection-believing Martha intervenes. The ever practical Martha, a wonderful host for Jesus, is concerned about the smell that will come from her brother's decomposing body. Jesus reminds her that she is about to see the glory of God. He prays, "Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe you have sent me." When you hear Jesus pray to his heavenly Father and when you hear him talk about his heavenly Father it convinces you he is the very Son of God. "When he had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus come out." Feast your eyes of faith on this amazing miracle. He stumbles out of the grave. People rush to unwrap the linen clothes that were wound around his body and his legs and his arms. Now the hugs begin just as they will when we are raised to life again on the last day with real glorified bodies. We live each day with this amazing miracle of the resurrection. Amen.