

Sermon for April 2, 2017
"I AM the Resurrection"

John 11:1-45

The story of the raising of Lazarus is one of those Gospel stories that's full of emotion and meaning. It begins when Mary and Martha, close friends of Jesus, send him the message that their brother Lazarus is close to death. They believe in Jesus and they know that he can heal Lazarus. But Jesus delays saying that the illness does not lead to death, but will glorify God. After two days Jesus heads to Bethany even though his disciples warn him that his enemies in Jerusalem will try to kill him.

When he arrives Lazarus is dead. For four days he has been laying in the tomb. Not only had Jesus not gotten there in time to prevent his death he had even missed the funeral. And then while speaking with Martha Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me even though they die yet shall they live." And Martha replies "I believe that you are the Messiah the Son of God."

After this Mary and Martha lead Jesus and the crowd of people to the tomb. Jesus orders them to remove the stone. Martha, who had just confessed that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of God, protests, "Lord, surely there will be a stench." When the stone is removed Jesus thanks God and cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." And Lazarus, who had been good and dead comes forth and many people believe in Jesus.

This is certainly a moving story but what's it about? It is first about Jesus' own death and resurrection. You can't miss the foreshadowing of Jesus own death in every step of the story. First of all we are reminded that this Mary who sent the note was the same one who would soon anoint Jesus as if for burial. Then when Jesus decides to go to Lazarus the first response of the disciples is that Jesus will be killed. In fact Thomas declares "Let us go with him that we too may die." Thomas seems convinced that Jesus was about to be killed. Then there is that part about the resurrection itself. What Christian familiar with the Easter story could miss it? The stone rolled away the mention of the funeral cloth. In short if Jesus has the power to raise Lazarus, he can defeat his own death.

The last verse that I read, verse 45, says that many believed in Jesus because of this miracle. But in verses 46-53 Jesus' enemies plot his death. This resurrection is the straw that broke the camel's back. The powers of darkness will try to stop Jesus from revealing God's glory by killing him. Within a few weeks of this event Jesus is on the cross.

Perhaps Lazarus would be a sign to the disciples. As they mourned the death of their Lord and Master perhaps Martha and Mary and Lazarus would be mourning with them. And the disciples would remember how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. They would also remember that Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Perhaps this would give them some hope and prepare them to believe when the resurrection did take place.

What's this story about? It's about Jesus own death, but it is about the death and resurrection of all believers. I had a Bible Study teacher once who said that there is a reason why Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth." If Jesus had said, "Come forth, Lazarus," then between the word "forth" and the word "Lazarus" every creature that had ever died would have risen. Jesus had to first specify who was to come forth, then call them forth. If not, then creation would have mistakenly thought Jesus was calling all that had died back to life.

I don't know if that is the case, but the point my teacher was making is true. Jesus is the resurrection incarnate. He is the power of life and new life in the flesh. Jesus not only has the power to raise a man almost 2,000 years ago and to raise himself, but to raise all who would believe in him.

It's significant that in the midst of his discussion with Martha, Jesus says not only that he is the resurrection and the life, but that all who believe in him shall rise as well. If we truly believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life then we will believe that he will raise us from the dead. You know that Lazarus eventually died again. But when Jesus raises us from the dead it will not be just to continue life as we now know it. He will raise us to eternal life.

What's this story about? It is about our deaths and resurrections. You know it is one thing to believe that Jesus has the power to raise us from the dead on some future date, but it is quite another to believe that Jesus can do something about our lives in the here and now. There are a lot of Christians who will readily say they believe that Jesus will give them eternal life, but they act as if he has no power to improve their lives right here right now. They are like Martha saying, "Lord I know that Lazarus will rise on the last day," not realizing that Jesus will rise him that day. If Jesus has the power to give us life after we are dead, then he certainly has the power to give us life here and now.

Jesus said "I AM the resurrection and the life." He didn't say, "I usta be," or "I will be," or "I'm gonna' be." He said "I AM!" He also said that he came so that we may have abundant life. Jesus, right here, right now, has the power to raise us up. To lift us out of whatever emotional pit we are in; to call us forth from whatever spiritual cave we are in, to roll away the stones of self-despair, and loose the grave clothes of self pity.

Like Lazarus, Jesus can call us forth. All we need to do is believe. Like Martha and Mary just call on Jesus in faith. That's what they did. They called on Jesus and he called them and their brother from death unto life.

Jesus says to us, "I AM the resurrection and the life those who believe in me even though they die yet shall they live." And then as with Martha he says to us, "Do you believe this?" And with all our hearts we who are Christians shout "Yea, Lord I believe! I believe you are the Son of God. I believe you are the Messiah my Savior. I believe you rose from the dead."

Then we take Jesus to the grave and we look at the tombstone and say, "Gee Lord, it's just too bad you weren't here in time to save my brother before he died." "Too bad you weren't here to save my marriage before it died." "Too bad you weren't here to cure my cancer before they had to amputate." "Too bad you weren't here to save my business before it went under." "Too bad you weren't here to prevent all those disappointments and heartaches and breakdowns before they occurred."

Then Jesus says, "Roll the stone away." And we protest, "Lord, that stinks!" "I don't want to dredge all that up again. It's too painful to look at. Just leave it buried there and let me mourn in peace."

But Jesus, determined to reveal to us his glory says, "Christian, come forth." And suddenly the dead parts of us come to life. And by the glory of God we are alive again. Whatever it was that had been dead in us is made alive once more.

Jesus IS the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes him, even though they die, yet shall they live! Do you believe this? Really?