

John 11:1-45  
Fifth Sunday in Lent  
March 22, 2026

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You may recall from last Sunday that we noted a few common themes and trends throughout these Lenten texts in John's gospel – (1) Christ as the giver of eternal life, (2) the length of these accounts of Jesus' signs, focused more on dialogue than on the miracle itself, (3) the wrestling of unbelief and belief in Jesus and His promises.

On this final Lenten Sunday before Palm Sunday, those themes reach a dramatically climactic peak, don't they? Today's text is the *longest* of the accounts; the theme of Christ – the giver of life – can't get any more tangible than him giving new life to the dead!; and the wrestling between belief and unbelief reaches a fevered pitch.

Now, one theme that may not be consistent *throughout* these Lenten texts, but is *very* recognizable in our hearing and for our meditation is the similarity between the previous sign of Jesus (the healing of the blind man) and this sign. Consider how Jesus had said of the blind man, "He did not sin, but that works of God might

be displayed in him.” Does Jesus not say something similar regarding Lazarus?: “This illness does not lead to death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Jesus sees the complementary nature of these occurrences, doesn’t he? He even uses a similar analogy to “working while it is day” and “being the light of the world” (as we heard those last week), he makes similar reference when he says in our text, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him.” Yes, how comparatively does Jesus see these occasions! How comparatively do we recognize these occasions – even in our own minds and memories – when we hear Jesus say both, “I am the light of the world” and, from this text, “I am the resurrection and the life.” We remember those, even from Sunday School days... two great “I am” statements by which Jesus testifies he is the source of the world’s light, life, and salvation!

The disciples also recognize the similarities of these occasions, but – for them – it’s a similarity of increasing danger on account of the Jews’ hatred of Jesus. When Jesus announces his plans to return to Judea, the disciples are quick to deter him, reminding him how the Jews responded in the verses following the healing of the blind man: “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going *there* again?” And, reliably doubting

Thomas, how does he put the sarcastic exclamation point on their concerns, but to say, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Indeed, the battle between unbelief and belief had become one in which physical safety – even life and death – is on the line.

In fact, following our text, after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and a large crowd gathered at Bethany to see this raised Lazarus, the Scriptures say that the chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus as well. Yes, just as we heard with the dialogue surrounding the blind man, you hear in our text the continued wrestle between belief and unbelief, highlighted even in the comment of some of them as they carefully watched Jesus weep at Lazarus’ tomb: “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” What wrestling!

But, the crowd’s wrestling, and the Jews’ hatred of Jesus, that all sort of fades into the background when the text focuses in on Martha and Mary, doesn’t it? And, as we said last week, if you can put yourself in the shoes of those wrestling with unbelief in last week’s text – the neighbors, the parents, the blind man himself – can’t we put ourselves in the shoes of Martha and Mary today?

Martha takes center stage first. Hearing that Jesus is coming, she goes to meet him, while Mary stays in the house. We perhaps often interpret Martha’s body language as body language we might have regarding death – more anxious, less calm, desperate, frustrated: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have

died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” How do we rightly interpret that? Is she blaming him? (Do we blame him when grieving the death of our loved ones?) Or, is this Faith? But, if it’s faith, perhaps it’s faith *bargaining* with God? (We know that as well, don’t we?)

Maybe the best way to explain it is the whole spectrum of emotional responses in the midst of grieving... that’s sort of the wrestling between unbelief and belief in such desperate times, isn’t it? You perhaps have known it for yourself or will know it for yourself just around the corner. Do we expect our fellow Christians or even ourselves to have this perfectly level-headed stoic response to something as unnatural and foreign to God’s creation as *death*? Jesus himself doesn’t have that stoic response, but weeps at the tomb of his friend! Why would we believe ourselves above the need – as if it’s more Christian to not shed a tear! – to weep and wrestle with what it all means?

Indeed, do we not often *pray* in a way that reminds us of Martha, especially regarding death? – “Lord, I know you have power over death. For whatever reason, you allowed my loved one to die. But, even now, Jesus, if you *want* to do something, you can; the heavenly Father will listen to you. So, how about just this once, Lord...”

And how does Jesus respond but to *teach* Martha (and us), to teach her to take heart that God does not deal with her through

theological *concepts* (death, resurrection, The End), but through a *person*, the Christ: “Your brother will rise again,” Jesus shifts her focus. “Yes, I agree, in the resurrection on the last day,” Martha confesses the *concept*. And then, Jesus refocuses her directly to Him: “*I AM* the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me will not die in the eternal age.”

Doesn't Jesus need to refocus us the same way?: Death and Resurrection are not defined by learning theological concepts; they are defined by focusing on a person, the Christ. Do you want to know what death is – look at the One being punished for your sins. *There* is death. That's *true* death. Temporal death is only symptomatic of the greater death. *True* death is embodied in the One who died the damning death for you.

But equally embodied in Him is the Resurrection. For, if he has the power to pay for your death, he also is the source of your resurrection... not only the light of the world, but the life of the world.

Meditate on this truth carefully – if you reduce the resurrection to a concept of a dreadfully distant day, you will lose heart, despair, and give up on that confession, “I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”

But, if we always see rightly that the resurrection is tied to the person, Jesus Christ, then your own resurrection is just as near to

you as He is. When he gives you his own resurrected body and blood in the Holy Supper, is he not thereby preparing your body and blood for your resurrection? When he is speaking the words of eternal life into your ear, is the certainty of that eternal life not now yours, it's unveiling just around the corner?

This perhaps is the notable difference between Martha's body language and Mary's. Their reception of Jesus begins with exactly the same words, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." But, where Martha *seems* to have come – could be interpreted as having come – almost frustrated, to challenge him, the text says that Mary comes only at His Word – "The Teacher is calling for you" – and she runs to him and falls at his feet... the body language of true worship. Had He not spoken to her the Word of Life before; had she not sat at these same feet of Jesus, not busy around the house and with the worries of life, but simply dwelling at the feet of the Person, of Jesus. Now, not busy with the worries of death, but simply dwelling at the feet of the same Jesus, utterly depending upon the same Person... not some theological concept called resurrection, but the Person, the Christ whom God had sent into the world.

When *you* say the Creed, are you dependent on some abstract theological concept from a textbook, or is your confession of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting not totally dependent upon the Person whose own body triumphed the grave,

whose own life now knows immortality and the everlasting day? You depend on *Him* and you belong to *Him* – “that I may be His own,” we confess in the Small Catechism, “and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.” Yes, your hope, your resurrection, your life *is* Jesus.

Is it not Jesus who spoke life into the Creation – “In the beginning was the Word... through Him all things were made, and nothing was made without Him that *was* made. In Him was **life**, and that life was the **light** of men,” John’s gospel says. (Notice, how all those themes tie together – light, life, the speaking into being – all the work of the Person, the Word, now made flesh.)

And, if Jesus spoke life into the Creation and spoke new life into Lazarus – “Lazarus, come out!” – then is our entire creation and new creation not totally dependent upon this Person... this Person who gives us His Holy Spirit, to take up residence in our hearts to defend us from death everlasting.

In other words, you do not believe in the Christian faith just as a *concept*; you believe in the Christ and are therefore a Christian. Just as the resurrection is no mere theological concept but dependent on a person, therefore so also all those other things you confess: the baptism that leads to the resurrection is no mere concept, but is totally wrapped up in the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ. How often do the Scriptures speak simultaneously of these

three truths – all from the Word and promise of Jesus Christ – baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, your share in Christ’s own resurrection!

Yes, we may return to the dust for a time – for God himself said we would and keeps His word – but we may always confess the resurrection to be not only as true as a distant day on a horizon, but as true as our present baptism – true today for Ernest, Joanna, and Elizabeth this past week; true for you and all the baptized – and as truly present as the person of Jesus, who gives us His Holy Spirit.

That’s where the other readings come in, isn’t it? Jesus gives us His Holy Spirit, and the Spirit protects us from the way of the flesh that leads to death and the lifelessness of the dust, and keeps us in the way of the resurrection and eternal life.

In the Old Testament reading, it is the Spirit – the breath of God – that brings life to the valley of dry bones, so that the Lord God declares, “Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves... And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live” – there’s the resurrection! – and the Lord even hints at the new creation, “And I will place you in your own land.” (Is that only a hope as true as a theological concept? Is tying baptism to the resurrection to the new creation our own theological concept? Or is that a hope as certain as the God-Man who said, “I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come and take you unto myself, that where I am, you may be also.”)

Again, the Holy Spirit presently and baptismally at work in us, leading to the resurrection and life everlasting – that’s also proclaimed in our Epistle Reading too, isn’t it? All the wrestling of “flesh versus Spirit” (which we’ve meditated upon a lot in our Lenten midweek series)... all of that culminates in *these* words: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

Is Christ’s resurrection a mere theological concept (or even just merely a truth of history)? Or is it as presently true as the risen God-Man himself, who promises to be with you this very hour. And so, is our journey toward our own resurrection merely a theological concept, or is it as presently true as the risen God-Man feeding us his own risen body and blood?

Therefore, just as this great sign of Jesus – the raising of Lazarus – was the source of the crowd’s excitement regarding his arrival to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, so it ought be our source of confidence regarding our arrival to Holy Week, just as Jesus once set His face to the holy city and saw: the city gates standing ahead; the enemies lying in wait; the wrath of God – in patient forbearance for thousands of years – about to be unleashed. And, through it all, our Lord Jesus looked to the cross and beyond, and knew that the resurrection was no theological concept true in theory, but it would

be true in His own person... that those who believe in Him, though they die, yet shall they live.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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