

Series: I Am

I am the Resurrection and the Life

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

John 11:17-44

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Easter Sunday morning, April 20, 2025

Good morning. Happy Easter. It is so good to be with you today on this Easter Sunday morning. I do not know if you have ever thought about it before, but the very first Easter began in a graveyard, which does not really seem to fit with the aesthetic, does it? I mean, if you think of Easter, you think of things like pastel colors and floral dresses, right? You think of chocolate candy that is somehow already beginning to melt before the Easter egg hunt even begins. When you think of Easter, you think of brunch reservations or floral walls where you can take a picture in front of them to put on your Instagram. I mean, it is the one day a year when for some reason we all silently agree to dress like a pack of human highlighters, right? It is like the one day a year where a man can get away with wearing lavender unironically and pull it off, and no one will ask any questions. You guys all look amazing, by the way, but it does not really fit. Easter in a graveyard, it does not match.

The first Easter had no floral dresses. It had women carrying burial spices. The first Easter did not have peeps or lilies. They had silence. It does not really match the vibe. The aesthetic seems off, but the first Easter began in a graveyard, and it is really important that we understand that, because if we miss where Easter begins, then we do not fully understand where Easter takes us, because before Easter was ever a celebration, it began in a cemetery, and that is where we find Jesus in this story. In John chapter 11, He is walking to the tomb of his close friend Lazarus, who has passed away, and what we are told in the story is that they send word to Jesus. They tell him, "Lazarus is sick." They ask for Jesus to come to heal him, to work a miracle, to make him well, and Jesus delays. He does not show up on time, and so in John chapter 11 verse 17, we are told this, that on his arrival, as Jesus arrived in the town, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Four days late to the funeral, four days too late to make a difference in the life of Lazarus, who had been sick.

That detail, four days, it is really important that we understand this idea, because in ancient Jewish tradition, they believed that the soul of a person stayed and lingered with the body up until three days, that for three days the soul would wait around just in case resuscitation happened, just in case the body came back to life, but after four days, that person was gone. They were not just mostly dead. They were all dead, as Billy Crystal said. John is trying to make it abundantly clear that Lazarus is all the way dead. He is truly gone. Jesus showed up late to the funeral, and as He walks into town, Lazarus has been dead for four days, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, they have been grieving, and the entire countryside has come out to the town to grieve with them, and as the two sisters are grieving the loss of their brother, they hear that Jesus is approaching. Mary decides she is not quite ready to talk to Jesus. There is a hint of frustration, or maybe even anger, resentment, and bitterness that Jesus did not show up sooner, but Martha chooses to go and meet Jesus on the road, and when she comes to Him, she comes and stands before Him, and it says this in verse 21: "'Lord,' Martha said, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'"

You can hear the conflict in her, can't you? I mean it is not hard to hear the edge in her tone: "If you had been here, if you had shown up when we asked, if you had not delayed, if you had come on time, my brother would still be alive." There is frustration, but then there is this glimpse of faith, "But even though he is gone, I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." There is faith, and there is frustration. Martha is coming to Jesus with an intellectual problem. She knows Jesus is good. She knows and understands that He loved Lazarus, but she does not understand his actions. She does not understand why He would not show up if he truly loved Lazarus, and so she is asking this question, "Where were you? Why did you not come when we needed you? Where were you?"

That is the kind of question that true faith exhibits, but to be honest with you, I think sometimes the place that is hardest to ask those kinds of questions, "Where are you, God? Why did you not show up in my life the way I needed you to?" Sometimes the hardest place to ask that question is in a room like this one. It is with believers. It is with those who follow Jesus, because we are really good at skirting the issue, aren't we? We are really good at pretending that the question does not matter, that we do not need to wrestle with the question, and so maybe you have been in a season of your life where you have asked the difficult questions, "Where are you, God? What are you doing in the world?" and someone in the faith community said, "You know what? Those are not the questions that we talk about. Those are not the kind of questions you should be asking. You just need to have a little more faith. Why would you even think that?" We are not always great about making space for questions.

It is not just faith. It can really be anything in life. I mean, I want you to think for a moment. We have some kids in the room. Are there any curious kids in the room that love asking a good question? Do you guys ask some good questions? Okay, we have a couple down here. Do you guys want to throw out a question or two? What's a good question that you have asked before? Yeah, "When's Christmas?" That is a great question. That is an important question. How soon is Christmas going to be here? I mean, kids are great at asking questions, and they ask questions all the time, and sometimes it is like, "Hey, when is this happening?" Sometimes it is like, "Why is this happening?" Or, like, "How are babies made?" or that kind of question, and it is the kind of question that literally I had a friend one time, she told me that in the same sentence, her daughter asked her, "Where do babies come from?" and "Why do we wear shoes?" What is that? That is crazy. How do you answer that? The questions just keep coming and coming and coming, and at first the questions are cute. They are even a little adorable. You are like, "Oh my gosh, like, I love that. I love that you are asking that," and then the questions keep coming, and it gets a little tiresome, and then the questions keep coming, and you realize it is only 7:45 in the morning, and you have not even had caffeine yet, and you are like questioning your existence, much less their questions, right, and every parent gets to a point where they feel like they have to tap out.

In my house, when I feel like I need to tap out after questions, there is a little catch phrase that I have come up with to try to answer the questions, and it is a really simple one. If you need to know what it is, or if you need a little help when your kids are asking questions, it is just simply this: "I do not know, go ask your mother." You just pass it on to someone else. You do not have to have the answers. It works almost every time. That is like us with questions, because we get to that place, we see question after question after question, we get overwhelmed, we get exhausted, we get exasperated, and we tap out, but that is not like Jesus.

What is fascinating to me about this story is that Martha comes with her questions, she comes with her doubts, and she comes with her frustration. “Where were you? Why did you not show up when we needed you? Why is my brother dead?” and Jesus does not chastise her. He does not rebuke her. He does not even say things like, “You just need to have a little more faith.” Jesus actually makes space for the questions. It is as if Jesus actually welcomes the unedited faith of Martha. He does not expect her to clean herself up or polish herself off or come to Him in a certain way. She can come to him raw and unedited. Jesus reveals something to us about the heart of God, that He welcomes questions. He is big enough for our doubts. He does not feel the need to silence us when we question and wonder what He is doing in the world. It is as if what we learn about Jesus in this story is that when He makes space, when the questions come, it is actually in that space that Jesus does not walk away from people or silence them, but He somehow draws closer. He comes closer to Martha at this moment. He makes space for her doubt. He does not expect her to pretend to be okay, and He is not disappointed with her, and He does not offer her Christian cliches, but Martha is not the only one who asks questions in this story.

There is another sister who has not even come out to greet Jesus yet. She is still not sure what to do about the situation, because her brother died, and she knows that if Jesus had been there, he would have lived, that Jesus had the power to heal, and so when she gets the moment to confront Jesus, and it is a confrontation, she comes to Him, and I want you to notice that it is the exact same question that her sister asked, but the posture is entirely different. In verse 32 it says, “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.’” Martha comes with her intellect and this dichotomy, this frustration, between faith and belief and frustration, but Mary just comes broken, with a broken heart and with grief, not understanding, and some of you know what that feels like. You know the feeling where grief is so overwhelming that it just crushes you to your knees, that it knocks you off your feet. That is Mary at this moment. She is coming to Jesus, and you notice there is no caveat. There is no, “Even now I still know.” She is coming with this full raw question, “Jesus, where were you? My brother is dead, and you could have done something about it, and you did not.” That is the weight of her grief, and many of you understand the weight of that grief.

That is the weight of the grief of a father who was never around when you were a child. It is the weight of a grief where you looked at the eyes of someone you once loved, and they said that they were done with you, and they walked away. It is the grief of a marriage that dies slowly. It is the grief of a family that has to bury a child. It is the grief of anxiety that claws at your chest every morning when you wake up, and no one else knows. It is the grief of heartache, of fear, of believing you did everything right, and God still did not show up the way that you expected Him to or needed Him to. It is the grief where heaven feels like it is silent. You know that grief, and that is Mary in this moment. She is feeling the weight of that grief: “Jesus, you could have done something. Jesus, you should have done something. Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would still be alive.”

The question is, how will Jesus respond to that question, because He makes space for Martha’s doubt, and He makes space for Martha’s confusion, but there still seems to be a glimmer of hope, a glimmer of faith that she is holding onto, but Mary’s grief seems like she is beyond all hope. She has nothing left to hold onto. Faith has just slipped through her fingers. What will Jesus do then? How will He respond to that type of grief and disappointment? How will He respond to her question?

It says in verse 33, it tells us this, that after Mary asked Jesus this question, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled, and then He asked the question, “Where have you laid him?” “Where is Lazarus?” and they said, “Come and see, Lord,” and then the shortest and yet potentially the most profound verse in all of scripture, “Jesus wept.” Jesus weeps. When Mary comes to Jesus in her grief, Jesus weeps with her. He sees her fall at his feet, crushed by the weight of grief, and He simply starts to cry with her.

Jesus is not distant or aloof. He does not fold his arms at our weakest moments or in our moments of desperation and say, “Oh man, that is too bad. I wish something could be different.” Jesus is the type of God who enters into our suffering and is with us in the deepest and darkest moments of our life. In the graveyards, in the tombs, where we think all hope is lost, Jesus weeps beside us, and it is so important that we understand this idea. Jesus does not just weep because He is powerless, but because He is present. He weeps because He is with us in the moment, not because He cannot fix it, but because He chooses to deeply feel our wounds as his own. He steps into our stories. Before Jesus ever raised Lazarus from the dead, He sat beside his tomb and wept with his sisters, because that is the kind of God He is. That is beautiful, a God who makes space for our questions and our doubt and our confusion, a God who makes space for comforting in us in our weakest and most desperate moments, but it is not enough. If we simply have a God who empathizes with us and feels bad for us and feels badly with us or makes space for our questions, that is one thing, but we need a God who is bigger than our questions, bigger than our doubts, bigger than our grief, and that is what we see in Jesus, because He does not just come to comfort us.

He actually comes to confront the very thing that causes our grief, so in verse 38 it says this, that after He wept with Mary, He asked to be led to the tomb, and they take Him to the tomb, and Jesus, it says this, “Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb, and it was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.” Now this so important for you to pick up this idea that He was deeply moved. It actually says that twice in this story, Jesus was deeply moved and troubled in spirit. Again, He was deeply moved. It is this very emotional language that does not come through in the English at all. In fact, it is the only time it is used in the gospels, and the only other place we see it in ancient literature is where it is used to describe the sound a horse makes before it charges into battle, a war horse charging into battle. We read this, and it is like, “Oh yeah, Jesus is upset. He is like, a little sad.” No, Jesus is furious. He is angry at this moment. What is he angry about? Why is He like a horse getting ready to charge into battle? Is it because of the questions that Mary and Martha asked? It is because of the people who are weeping beside the tomb, and He’s like, “You just need to get over it”?

No, Jesus is furious in this moment because He is looking at the devastation of death, and He knows that this not the way that the world was supposed to be. This was not the world that He created. We were created for life, and when He encounters death, it is as if He is confronting his greatest and oldest enemy. He is like a war horse ready to charge into battle, to confront all of the things that cause grief in our lives. It is as if in this moment, Jesus, He feels the weight of death from the beginning of time to the end of time. It is as if every open casket, every stillborn baby, every tear shed beside a hospital bed, it is as if He feels the weight of all of it at this moment, and He is not just weeping with those who weep, but He is ready to confront death itself, and so Jesus walks to the tomb, and He sets his face like flint, and with fury in his heart, He says, “Someone move that stone out of the way.”

There is this hesitation. There is this murmur. There is this pause in the crowd. They are like, “What is Jesus doing?” and they begin to freak out a little bit, and no one really knows what to say, and no one knows. Like, “Jesus, you are four days late. He has been dead. It is too late for goodbyes. Why are you telling us to open back up the tomb?” No one has the courage to say anything, and so Martha speaks up, and she says, “Jesus, he has been gone for four days. The smell is going to be terrible,” and Jesus turns and looks at her, and He says, “Martha, did I not tell you that if you believed in me, then today you would see the glory of God revealed to you? Now someone move that stone out of my way,” and so they roll the stone out of the way, and Jesus looks up to heaven, and He begins to pray, but He’s not praying for Lazarus. He is not praying for Himself. He is praying for the people that are there to witness what’s about to happen. He says, “Lord, I know that you hear me. Father, I know you hear my prayers. Show them that you hear me.” He is praying for the people who are witnessing what He is about to do, that they would see and understand what it is that He has come to do, and after He is finished praying, He takes his eyes from heaven, and He looks into the tomb, and then in a loud voice He shouts out, “Lazarus come out.” There is a pause, a moment of stillness. Everyone is holding their breath in anticipation, and then suddenly, a man in grave clothes walks out of the tomb.

Now I think sometimes we get this image of this moment that everyone would have just begun cheering, like they just won the Super Bowl or something like that. Everyone is saying, “This is awesome. A dead person just came back to life.” This is like a horse. This is mummies, right? This is a person still wrapped in grave clothes walking out of his own tomb. People freaked out. They did not understand what was happening, because dead things do not come back to life unless it is by the power of Jesus’ word. What Jesus does in this moment is He tries to show them, and He is trying to tell everyone who is witnessing this moment on that day and this day that He is the one who has resurrection power over death. The reason why it is so important that we understand that Lazarus was dead for four days is this was not a resuscitation. This was a resurrection. Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead because He is not just a God who comforts us in death but a God who conquers death.

Jesus said in the middle of this story as He is talking to these two sisters as they are grieving and questioning and doubting and wondering, Jesus comes to them, and in verse 25 He says this, “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?” Jesus says that He is the resurrection and the life. He does not say that it is on offer, that resurrection is possible. He does not say that if you believe in me, then you can have resurrection. He says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” What a statement, “I am the resurrection and the life,” which means at least two things.

When Jesus says He is the resurrection, it means that He and He alone has the power to bring dead things back to life, and He did not just demonstrate it at Lazarus’ tomb, although that was a sign of the truth of what He said. Jesus is the resurrection and the life because when He was crucified, when He was killed, when they placed Him in his own tomb, three days later He walked out of his own power, and He conquered death. Jesus is the resurrection and the life because He puts the graveyard in the grave. He puts death to death, and every time we say, “He is risen” on Easter, we are celebrating and remembering that story. The resurrection means that because Jesus has conquered death, it means that if we believe in that story, if we believe in what He has done, even when we die, we will live, because He is offering eternal

life, resurrection life, that death is not the end of our story. It is simply a doorway. That is the story of Christianity, and when we say, “He is risen,” that is the story we proclaim, but it is not just a hope for the future, as good as that is. Resurrection is actually about the present. It is about life now. “I am the resurrection and the life.” That life is actually something that is a present reality. It is available to us now. What Jesus is saying is that you now, in this world that is plagued by death, where you constantly encounter brokenness, you can experience life to the fullest, that when you believe in me, I resurrect you now in this life so you can experience life with me and bring new life to you.

We miss this idea. We understand, we assume sometimes that Christianity, we get this idea that Christianity is about cleaning yourself up or making yourself a better person or becoming a better person as you follow Jesus, but that actually misses it. Jesus did not say that if you really want self-improvement, then follow me, and I will give you the ten best ways to do it. Jesus did not say, “Follow me, and I will give you five steps to the life you have been looking for.” Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” The idea of resurrection is not about self-improvement. It is about rebirth. When Jesus Christ says He is the resurrection and the life, that life is available to you right now, that you can live in resurrection in this life. In the ordinary, messy, everyday existence, you can experience life with Jesus.

At Waterstone we have this saying. We like to say, you have probably heard it before, “Jesus did not come to just make bad people good or good people better. Jesus came, died, and rose again to bring dead people back to life.” That is the story that we believe. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and that means He brings new life wherever it is needed. Easter, it began in the graveyard, and that is not just a detail. That is the point. That is the whole point of Easter, because resurrection does not happen in places that are already alive. It happens in places that feel lost, that feel hopeless, that feel buried, that feel dead. That is where resurrection takes place. For you to understand the true meaning of Easter, to understand its significance, and to appreciate the promise, you really need to spend Easter in a cemetery, where one day Jesus will call out in a loud voice, and all of those who believed in Him will come up out of their graves and find life in Him again. Easter started in the cemetery, but it will end in the celebration. It is the reason we celebrate with flowers and pastels, and yes, even men wearing lavender, because Jesus has risen from the dead. He is the resurrection and the life. Amen? He is risen. He is risen. Amen.

So, one of the ways we tell the story of resurrection here at Waterstone is through the act of baptism, and we especially like to do this act on Easter, because baptism tells the story of us being buried with Christ in death and brought to newness of life in the power of his resurrection, and so in a few moments you are going to hear some stories of how Jesus has brought new life to people, and we celebrate those stories, but here is something I know. It is that you might be here today, and you might be thinking that this the first time this story has made sense to you in a new way, and maybe like Jesus asked Mary and Martha when He said, “I am the resurrection and the life,” He finished that statement with a simple question, “Do you believe this?” For those of you that would answer “yes,” to that question, “Yes, I believe that Jesus is the resurrection and life,” the charge for us is to go forth from here and live in resurrection life, but there are some of you here this morning who have not said, “yes,” to that question, but you are beginning to feel something stir. I would encourage you to come forward and talk to me or one of the other pastors, and after this moment of baptism, for those of you who wish to, maybe you have followed Jesus, but you have not decided to be baptized and to follow Him in baptism, proclaiming the story of his death

and resurrection, after we baptize these few people, there is going to be a space where you can be baptized as well if you want to, and just so you know, you do not have to worry about your Easter best clothes. We have a change of clothes and towels and everything ready for you to go if you need it, but what I would encourage you to do in this moment as we hear the stories of resurrection in this video, and then as we worship together, if at any point in the next five minutes you decide that you want to be baptized today, I would encourage you to come forward, stand over by those doors right there, and we will have a conversation with you today about responding to the good news of resurrection with the act of baptism.

In the first service I totally came up at the wrong song at the end of the service, and they were watching me at this time, and I totally nailed it this time, so good job, me. Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, no. As we close today, man, I just, I love this church so much. I love what God is doing here. I love the new life that He is bringing. Jesus said that He is the resurrection and the life. If you are not sure you believe that, then I would just encourage you to hang out here a little while, and you will see that reality, because He is bringing people back to life, bringing marriages back from the dead, breathing new life into our stories, and so we would love for you to learn more about that. If you have any questions about Jesus or what it means to follow Him, I and some other pastors, we will be down here to talk to you after service, and we would be happy to.

If you are curious about this question, “Do you believe this?” that Jesus asked, maybe you are not sure what you believe, then I would encourage you to come back next week. We are kicking off a new series called Ancient Faith, where we are looking at an ancient proclamation, an ancient creed called the Nicene Creed. Its seventeen-hundredth anniversary is this year, and we are going to be looking at what it is that we believe about Jesus, who He is, what He is doing in the world, and what He has been doing in the world for the last two millennia, so I would love for you to come back as we kick that off next week.

Now, if you would please receive the benediction, as we go from here this Easter Sunday, Heavenly Father, Christ the Son, and Holy Spirit, God, we pray in your name that Waterstone would be a place of resurrection, that it would not just be some future hope that we look towards, although that is true, but that it would be a present reality that we live out. May people look at us and recognize that there is new life in us, and may we share that message with those around us, and it is in Christ’s name that we pray, amen. Go, in peace.

30:35 minutes