

JOHN 11:25

RESURRECTION COURAGE Easter 2014

Our Scripture text for this morning's message is found in John chapter 11 which is also found on the insert in your bulletin. It is from the story of Jesus and Lazarus who was a dear friend of Jesus and the brother of Martha and Mary. In verse 1 of John 11 Jesus heard that Lazarus was very ill and when he finally arrived in Bethany where Lazarus lived Jesus learned that his friend had been dead four days **20-25** *Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. 21 Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died 22 "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You. 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.* Are you afraid to die? Put a little differently, are you afraid of death? And if your initial response is "no" is it the case that you don't fear because you don't think? You have felt so uncomfortable in the face of death that you do your best to forget about it. It's fairly easy in our society to go for long stretches without a reminder of death in your life. We send our seriously ill off to hospitals where they can die in peace surrounded by expensive machines and highly trained medical personnel who can keep them hanging on the brink of death for days or weeks or months, but we don't see it. We can go for long stretches of time without a thought of death but every now and then it jumps up and slaps us in the face doesn't it? That has been our last month hasn't it? Sometimes you can't forget. Every year, I think, the reality of death is pressed upon my consciousness to a greater degree. More and more, as a pastor, I confront the dying and the grieving. Some of you older friends know this far more than I that you reach a point when death can't be ignored anymore. You have to find a way to cope with the fears. Some people cope with sentimental talk of heaven; some cope with the imaginations of reincarnation; some cope by staying high. All of it is an attempt to deal with fear, fear of death which is a deep, dark, horrible hole from which there is no escape. Are you afraid of death? John Wesley who founded the Methodist church was once a missionary afraid of death. He wrote *I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh, who will convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well and believe while no danger is near. But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, "to die is gain." I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun my last thread, I shall perish on the shore. Oh who will deliver me from this fear of death? -Burning Heart p.57-*

Are you where Wesley was? Is it death that scares you, or is it judgment and hell? Or maybe for some of you it's neither. Hell doesn't scare you. You either don't believe you would ever go there or you don't believe it exists. The state of non-existence, if there is such a thing doesn't thrill you but it doesn't scare you. Maybe you are just afraid of dying, the process and the pain. It's like Woody Allen said, "*I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens.*" Whatever your situation, I know this about you - death doesn't sit well with you. There is something about the termination of life that seems terribly terribly wrong to you. The Bible says death is terribly, terribly wrong because you are made in the image of God with eternity stamped upon you. You are made to be immortal. And since we feel that deep down we talk about gaining immortality. Some can only muster enough hope to suggest that we have immortality in that the good we do lives on after us, or maybe the idea is that you have immortality by producing children who live on. Again, I like what Woody Allen said. He sees how cheap are these forms of a poor man's immortality and he said, "*I prefer to have immortality by never dying.*" Put me down for that. That's the only kind of immortality that turns me on. I don't like death, but I refuse to pretend that everything is okay in spite of it. The New Testament says that ever since the sin of Adam death has reigned! And as long as death reigns everything is far from okay.

Now, you may be starting to wonder how long I'm gonna go on about this. You came here to be inspired and encouraged and edified and here I am talking about death. No, not really. My point really isn't about death - it's about fear. It struck me as I've been reading the story of Christ's last week in Jerusalem how dominant fear was in everything that went on in the greatest week of history. It seems that everybody, almost, who was involved in the Easter story was controlled by fear. Just think about it for a minute. First of all, there were the Jews who plotted to have Jesus killed. What was their motivation? Very clearly it was fear. This 11th chapter of John tells of how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and I want you to see the reaction of the Jewish leaders to this incredible miracle. **45-48** *Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done. 47 ¶ Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.* What are they saying? Are they disputing the authenticity of Christ's miracles? No. They

are saying “woah, if this continues everybody is going to be following Jesus, there will be a great social uproar, and the Romans won't let us run our own affairs anymore.” They envisioned Rome squishing a Jesus-led uprising and removing the privileges previously granted to the Jews. The priests were afraid of losing power, so they said, "let's kill Jesus." But Roman law didn't allow Jews to put a man to death so they appealed to the Roman governor Pilate to do it. But they ran into a problem. Pilate didn't want to do it. Pilate was mystified by Jesus. He was even scared of Jesus. Pilate said, "I find no guilt in this man." But he, Pilate, sent him to the cross, why? Fear of the Jews who threatened Pilate with political trouble. When Pilate said, "I find no guilt in him." John 19:7 *The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."* Now listen to the next verse **8-9** *Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; 9 and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.* Pilate was seriously spooked and tried to let Jesus go but the Jews cried out **12cd** *If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.* **That** is what scared Pilate. Caesar was like Kim Jong-un of Korea and nobody wanted to be regarded or accused as disloyal. So it was political fear that led Pilate to sentence Jesus to death. Incredible isn't it?

Then too there was the fear of Simon Peter, the leader of the disciples. After Jesus had been arrested and taken away to trial Peter hung around trying to find out what was happening and three separate times someone saw him and said, "hey, you were one of his disciples weren't you?" All three times Peter denied it, even with cursing and an oath. Why? He was afraid of being identified with a criminal. He was afraid of what others might think. He was afraid they might come after him next. Peter was controlled by fear. Then we read of Joseph of Arimathea, who was a pharisee who happened to believe in Jesus. Joseph was the one who, by his own request, took the body of Jesus and buried it. Joseph didn't do anything wrong during this period but I was intrigued by the description we are given of him in John 19:38 where it says that Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, a secret one. Hey, that sounds neat doesn't it? Secret Christian man. Sort of like Secret Agent man. I saw a church sign once that indicated the pastor was named John Secret. I began to think of how much fun that name would be. When they called up for a baby-sitter they would ask, “Can you keep a little secret?” I told Beth that the guy probably had changed churches a lot in his career because everyone knows that churches are not good at keeping a secret. I met a members of his church and asked who the pastor was. He told me, "It's Secret." *I said, well, I'm a pastor too, you*

can tell me. Anyway, he really was a Secret Christian man. You know about secret Christians don't you? Some of you are one. You really like Jesus you just don't want anyone else to know. Someone has called them Clairal Christians, only God knows for sure. Do you know why some of you are secret Christians? Fear. Fear of what others may think. That was the problem with Joseph. The verse I quoted says he was a secret disciple for fear of the Jews.

The roll call of the fearful continues with the Roman guards who were placed at the tomb of Jesus to make sure the dead man didn't escape. Matthew 28 records that on that Easter morning there was an earthquake which brought with it an angel who rolled away the grave stone which blocked the way to the body of Christ. **3-4** *And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.* The guards were afraid too and to their credit they had a good reason. Then we read of the women who came to the tomb of Jesus. When they encountered the angel and the empty tomb they too were afraid. And finally there were the disciples. John 20:19 says they were holed up in a secret place because they were afraid that the Jewish leaders may come after them next when all of a sudden Jesus appeared and said, "peace." Everybody in this story is afraid of something and somebody aren't they? They were all controlled by their fears. And I can't help but think that this is the way most people function, most of the time. The novelist, Joseph Heller, wrote a book several years ago entitled, "Something Happened," and in this book, which is written in narrative form, he tells the story of a rather insipid middle-aged man who is wrestling with all of the forces around him, and recognizes that nothing is working. In one of the chapters he describes his office experience.

In the office where I work there are five people of whom I am afraid. Each of these five people is afraid of four people, for a total of 20. And each of these 20 people is afraid of six people, making a total of 120 people who are feared by at least one person. Each of these 120 people is afraid of the other 119 and all of these 145 people are afraid of the 12 men at the top of the company who helped to found the company and build it and now own and direct it.....In the normal course of a business day, I fear Green and Green fears me. I am afraid of Jack Green because my department is part of his department and Jack Green is my boss. Green is afraid of me because most of the work in my department is done for the sales department, which is more important than his department and I am much closer to Andy Cadle, the sales manager, and the other people in the sales department than he is. In my department, there are six people who are afraid of me, and one small secretary who is afraid of all of us. I have one other person working for me who is not afraid of anyone, not even me, and I would fire him quickly except that I am afraid of him. The thought occurs to me often that there must be mail clerks, office boys and girls, stock boys, messengers, and assistants of all kinds and ages who are afraid of everyone in the company; and there is one typist in our department who is slowly going crazy, and all of us are afraid of her..... So, I scare Green, Green scares White and White scares Black, and Black scares Brown, and Green and Brown

scares me and Green and Andy Cadle, and all of this is absolutely true because Forrest White really is afraid of conversation with Jack Green and Johnny Brown and he bulldozes everyone around him with strong shoulders, a practical mind, and a tough outspoken mouth, but he is afraid of Lester Black who protects him. I know it is true, because I worked this whole thing out on a color wheel one very dull and wet afternoon.

That's the way life is isn't it? Our lives are so full of fear. We can't stand up for truth; we can't tell others about Jesus because of the persecution of the raised eyebrow. We are afraid of what others think. Do you High School students struggle with this? Teens typically want to look cool and in control when they are actually terrified of looking bad. Parents can't do their job well either because they are afraid they won't be liked by their children. Some of you stood here in church today mumbling thru the songs because your afraid the guy next to you will think you can't sing, or even worse, that you are some kind of religious fanatic. Fear Fear Fear Fear Fear Fear - it wears on you after a while. It drives you to drink, it drives you to a pleasure-soaked indulgence of body and brain, to laziness, to wimpiness, to selfishness. So few people live their lives by principles because they live by fear. Few live by faith, because they live by fear. Few live by love because they live by fear. Are you sick of letting fear control you?

What does this have to do with Easter? Well, the Easter story is designed to be an antidote for fear; and it addresses even the greatest of fears - the fear of death. That's the big one I think. I saw a film in seminary about death in which the narrator said, "Death is one of the biggest events in a person's life." I thought, "man alive, that's the understatement of the decade." Death is not one of the big ones, it is the big one. Well, Easter hope can wipe away fear of even the big one. Stay with me and discover why. You will notice, as you read the Easter story in the gospels, that everyone is controlled by fear except one person, and that, you might guess, is Jesus. Was Jesus afraid? Was He afraid of the Jews? No. Was He afraid of Pilate? No. Was He afraid of dying on the cross? Hold on. Was He afraid of dying on the cross? I believe He was. In fact, Luther said that no man ever feared death like Jesus. No man ever faced a death like that of Christ. His was a death for others. His death was a literal hell as He paid the debt that sinners owed. If you read Luke 22 you see how Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane poured forth blood, sweat and tears as he thought of what awaited Him. Jesus did have fear **but!** He was never controlled by that fear and that is the critical difference. The Jews and Pilate, and Peter, and Joseph and the guards and the disciples were all controlled by their fear. They weren't living by principle or by faith or by love but by fear. Jesus was just the opposite. He wasn't facing the raised eyebrow. He wasn't facing political loss. He wasn't just facing pain and

death. Jesus was facing the wrath of Almighty God yet He did as His Father commanded. He gave Himself over, He went to the cross and despite the taunts and the jeers He stayed there until He died! Fear did not have its way - not with Jesus. Why not? Jesus had something you can have. He had something I want all of you to have. He had what I call resurrection courage.

Resurrection courage is to be distinguished from worldly courage. Worldly courage is something that many novelists and philosophers might encourage you to have, but it is a courage without hope. It is courage in the face of despair. It is the courage that says, "life is meaningless so be courageous." This kind of thing has been depicted in numerous novels and films in this century. One of those was a movie called "The White Cliffs of Dover" in which Peter Lawford played the part of a World War II pilot who gets shot out of the sky near the magnificent white cliffs of Dover. His plane is obviously failing and heading right towards the rocky sides of those great cliffs. And Lawford, in a great display of existential courage, defiant to the end, spits out of his plane at the cliffs just moments before his plane crashes and the movie ends. And everybody in the theatre says, "Wow, what courage." Woody Allen and the Apostle Paul are saying, "what nonsense." Life is meaningless, so be courageous. Does that do anything for you? It doesn't make sense. It is no basis at all for courage. **But**, if there is a life to come; if there is a God who will judge every man according to his works, if there is a reward for faithfulness, then you have a basis for courage - not found in despair, but in resurrection hope and resurrection power. What was it that enabled Jesus to go on in spite of pain and fear? What motivated Him to put up with what He did, to stay up on the cross, to suffer as He did? It was the certainty which He had about the resurrection. Jesus had said numerous times over that when He went into Jerusalem He would be opposed and mocked and beaten and killed but that on the third day He would rise from the dead. And I submit to you that it was His certainty that He would live again that strengthened Him to live by faith and not by fear. Hebrews 12:2 *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* That verse says it was the joy set before Him, promised to Him by His Father, that enabled Jesus to endure the cross.

The resurrection was the key to Christ's courage and it will be the key for yours because it eliminates the fear of eternal death. When you know the One who said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" you **can** spit into the face of death. You can say, "Oh Death, where is your sting? Oh, grave where is your victory?" A three year old can learn John 3:16. That's a nice verse to memorize

but let me tell ya, if you understand it and trust it you have there the basis for facing life and death without fear. Say it with me: 3:**16** *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* That is the promise Christ affirmed to us when He Himself returned from the dead. He showed us that He holds the keys of death and hell and so is able to keep His promises. That's why you can have resurrection courage, not just in the face of death but in the face of peer pressure and the eyebrow persecution. The first thing Jesus said after His resurrection was, "Do not be afraid." And listen to this statement of Jesus. John 16:**33** *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.* Take courage, why? Because life is meaningless? Because I have overcome the world. Listen to what was prophesied by Zacharias just before the birth of Jesus Luke 1:**68-69** *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant. 74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear.* That, to me is a fascinating verse because it speaks of God's purposes in the coming salvation thru Jesus. Jesus came it says that we might serve God how, without fear. That's fantastic! No longer need we be enslaved to our fear of man, our fear of Satan, our fear of death. We have courage thru the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Last week I played basketball with a young guy who had a T-shirt depicting William Wallace. Remember that name? From the movie, *Braveheart*? In one of my rare trips to the theatre, many years ago I went to see that movie which is now on cable three times a week. The graphic violence in the movie left me staring at the corner of the big screen at times, but the story that movie depicts is awesome. *Braveheart* brought you face to face with death. That's for sure. But it was also a magnificent portrayal of how differently men respond to it. For some, death becomes the ultimate evil, to be avoided at all costs. Truth, integrity, conscience are all negotiable in the face of danger. For such as these, fear has its own way. And listen, if this life is all there is, then I understand that. If there is no resurrection then hang on to this life at any price! But! But, if there is something beyond, if there is a judgment, if there is a promise, if there is eternity then we are free to live as men of principle and conviction and character. We are free to face the onslaught of evil and say, "No" regardless of the costs. The Scottish patriot, William Wallace, as portrayed in *Braveheart*, was a man who could see beyond the grave. And because of that he saw that there are things worthy dying for. Do you believe that? Is there anything worth dying for? Recent polls show that most

college students in our country can't think of a single thing for which they would give their lives. What a pity! (R) My favorite line in *Braveheart* is when the hero is being urged to compromise lest he die a torturous death. And he says this: "All men die, but not all men truly live." (R) A life shackled by fear is no life. And until you have something worth dying for you have nothing worth living for. You watch movies about war, like *Braveheart*, and *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Gettysburg*. You wonder what compelled these men to stand across a field from each other and run at each other with swords and spears, with minimal hope of survival. Where does that kind of courage come from? For the Christian, it comes from Easter. It is resurrection courage.

I want to show you one more passage and we'll be done. (Acts 4) To understand Acts 4 you need to know that in Acts 3 Peter and John had just given new legs to a man who was lame after which they took opportunity to collect an offering. No, to preach the good news about Jesus. But the Jewish leaders were not pleased. 4:**1-7**

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. 5 ¶ On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. 7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

Did you hear all that? Here are two worker-class Jewish Christians dragged in front of the rulers, elders, scribes, the high priest and all his family. If there was ever gathered a group to intimidate any Jew this was it. They are placed, it says, in the center of this crowd and challenged to defend themselves. Now read on **8-10b** *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. Peter is not mincing words here is he? **10b-12** by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. In just a few short verses Peter told them that they had crucified the son of God, that Jesus is risen from the*

dead, that they foolishly rejected their Messiah and that salvation belongs exclusively to those who follow Jesus. This is the same Peter who weeks before had denied Jesus before a servant girl. OR is it? No, it is now a Peter full of resurrection courage! And you see the response of the Jewish leaders. They were blown out of their seats. **13a** *Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men.* Their courage was not based in any intellectual superiority, oh no. **13** *Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.* You spend time with Jesus and you are going to lose something. Your fear. You will live by principle, by faith, by love, not fear.

Do you get it? Do you want to be set free from sin, set free from guilt, set free from fear? Jesus said, "if you abide in my word you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." If you are here today and you don't have a clue what Jesus taught that would set you free from guilt and fear ask a Christian friend. If you don't have one ask me. I would be delighted to talk with you and share with you the life-changing message of the Risen King. I'm excited about that message because my reasons to fear died with Jesus on the cross and when He rose again they were buried forever. Praise God! Let's pray.