

April 10, 2011  
 Sermon for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
 St Peter Lutheran Church  
 Bowie, TX  
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
 John 11:17-27, 38-53

John 11:17-27 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

<sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

John 11:38-53 (ESV)

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." <sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, <sup>46</sup> but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup> So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." <sup>49</sup> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. <sup>50</sup> Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." <sup>51</sup> He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. <sup>53</sup> So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Several years ago, there was a man in LA who was being interviewed on the radio after one of that city's riots. In the interview he confessed to stealing a set of Gospel tapes. When asked why, he replied that he loved Jesus.

There are many people in the world that claim to love Jesus but really have no idea of what loving Jesus really is. Their knowledge or comprehension of what His love in their lives means seems to be lacking.

Mary and Martha loved Jesus. They attested to that fact quite often, but their love does not mean that they really understand or comprehend Christ's complete love or sacrifice really meant to them or for their brother Lazarus. Jesus is the very power of life for all mankind. As Jesus taught in our text for today, life does not end in physical death.

Believers in Christ will not die. Yes there is a physical death but that does not mark the end for believers in Christ. Lazarus experienced physical death as will all us, but contrary to popular opinion, physical death is not natural, it is a sickness—a result of sin—and sin is a terminal sickness.

Physical death is all around us and is inescapable unless Christ's return comes first. (1 Thess. 4:13-15) As Paul tells us in Romans "the wages of sin is death". Death is a basic human problem. It belongs to us because of our sin and this makes us painfully aware of our death.

We sometimes worry about it, knowing that it is waiting for us at the end of our days. Not only does our own death affect us but the death of others also has an effect on us.

In our text, Mary, Martha, as well as their entire community was affected by the death of Lazarus. The death also affected Jesus as we are told that He wept. The death of loved ones affects us with sorrow and loss. Death is a reality for all of us, including Jesus.

Jesus knew that His return to Bethany in Judea would result in His arrest and that the arrest would end in His death. The disciples even tried to warn Jesus about this. We heard in our Gospel that the religious leaders were plotting His death, yet this did not deter Jesus who had even prophesied His own death in verse 13.

Jesus' death was a necessity. It had to be done to appease God's wrath over the sins of mankind. This was the plan God had set forth all the way back in the Garden of Eden after mankind first fell into sin—the plan was now coming into play. Only through the perfect sacrifice—suffering, death, and resurrection could our sins be forgiven.

The events surrounding the death of Lazarus were a mere reflection of the effects of sin that Jesus would be carrying to the cross. Our sins saddens God, just as earthly parents are disappointed in their children when they do wrong, so to, God is saddened and disappointed when we sin. Our sins demanded atonement. No simple penance or act of contrition but a full atonement. In this way, the sins of the world—including ours—necessitated Christ's death.

Isaiah reminds us that “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; and by His wounds we are healed” (53:5) The healing of Christ’s atonement includes far more than forgiveness alone. It also includes our own resurrection so that we might have eternal life in Heaven.

Jesus claimed to be the resurrection and the life. He proved His claim as He raised Lazarus from the dead. Popular thought at the time is that it took three days for the soul to fully depart, possibly an ancient holdover from the Jewish captivity in Egypt. This may have been why Jesus waited the extra time before coming to Bethany, so that there would be no hope in the minds of the family for Lazarus’ return. They would have been sure that his soul had fully departed so that popular myth would not shadow the true miracle of Jesus.

Just as four days in the tomb for Lazarus was no match for Jesus, three days in the tomb were no match for the Resurrection and the Life Jesus claimed as His own following His death on the cross. No time in the tomb is too much for Jesus to overcome for He is the Resurrection and the Life. Just as death had no hold on Jesus, it has no hold over us also nor for any that call upon Christ as their Savior.

All of us today would agree with the fact that we love Jesus, but our love, just like the love of the family of Lazarus for Jesus, does not necessarily mean that we comprehend Christ’s complete power for us in the resurrected life that we live now as forgiven sinners and the resurrected life that we will live in eternity.

Jesus is the Resurrected Life. He has given us the gift of faith through the Holy Spirit and by that faith, the faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, we have the promise of eternal life and salvation.

In the midst of our sometimes trying walk on this earth, we might often feel powerless against sin, death, and the power of the devil, yet we have a powerful Ally that has defeated the very same foes that we face today. That ally is Jesus Christ our Lord. We no longer have to grieve without hope when a loved one dies...we have the power of the resurrection to know that we live in the newness of life which holds the hope and promise of our own resurrection from the dead and the resurrection of all that call upon the name of the Lord.

Life does not end in death. We will rise again on the last day and forever celebrate the joy of life we have in Jesus Christ, who is the Resurrection and the Life. He has paid the price, so that we have the promise of that joyful benefit of eternal life in Him.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.