

Text: John 11:17-27,38-45. Fifth Sunday in Lent. **April 6, 2014.**

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus, our conqueror of death. Amen.

Death. No one likes to talk about it. Death. It's a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad word. Death. Why do you keep saying it? Death. We just hate the word. Death. We try to delay it with exercise and medicines, but we know it's still coming. Death. We try to euphemize it. They aren't called funerals anymore. The obituaries call them, "Celebrations of life." We talk about end of life issues. And the greatest euphemism of all, "Life insurance." You only collect if you die, so why call it life insurance? Death. Here's the worst part. Death is always the winner. We can avoid it, delay it, euphemize it, but death always wins, every time, over every person. Or so it seems. Jesus is our conqueror of death. Jesus defeated death. Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus went into a cage match with death and Jesus came out the winner. Jesus rose. Jesus lives. Jesus is alive and is still alive and will always be alive. And so will everyone who believes in Jesus. I know it's hard to believe. I know it sounds crazy, but my Christian friends, that's the best part about being a Christian. You are going to rise. You are going to live. You are going to defeat death just like Jesus did. You are going to rise from death just like Jesus did. You can stare death in the face, with no fear, with full confidence and say, "Death, I am not afraid of you! I defeat you. I defy you. I am not afraid of you!" Jesus is our conqueror of death. Jesus is our conqueror of death.

Jesus shows that very clearly in this account of raising Lazarus. Let's just give a little background. Jesus had a good friend named Lazarus. Lazarus was very sick, so sick his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to Jesus. Shockingly, Jesus did not come right away to heal Lazarus. Jesus waited until after Lazarus died and was dead four days before showing up. Why would Jesus wait? Hang on, we'll get to that.

We pick up the scene at Jesus' arrival. Friends are there to comfort the mourning sisters, even four days later. It seems, it seems, like Jesus has come too late. Yet in the face of Jesus' delay, in the throes of mourning the loss of her brother, Martha makes a most wonderful confession of faith. It's really hard to believe the words Martha speaks. Martha often takes some flack and rightly so, for being too busy making a meal to listen to Jesus' words on another occasion, but here, she jumps right up, walks right up to Jesus and says some astounding words.

Let's hear them again. **Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.** Wow! Did you really hear that? My brother would not have died. I have full confidence that you could have healed him from this fatal illness. But Martha didn't stop there. **But I know, I know, that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.** Wow again! Even now, even after he's dead, even after all hope seems lost, even now God will give you whatever you ask? What will Jesus ask? Was Martha confessing faith that Jesus would raise her brother? Was Martha simply placing herself and her complete trust in Jesus at the most incredibly difficult time? Even now, God will give you whatever you ask. Wow a third time.

And it gets even better. When Martha starts talking with Jesus, her confession of faith in Jesus as the conqueror of death becomes even more clear, more astounding. **I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.** Wow and wow and wow again! I know I keep saying wow, but this is one amazing confession. Here her brother is dead and she's talking about the resurrection. She's not comforting herself with how little her brother suffered. She's focused on the resurrection, she's looking ahead to Lazarus conquering death. She believes in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, just like every Christian always has.

And when she is very specifically asked, "Do you believe this?" She responds with full confidence. Yes, Lord, I believe. I have been brought to believe this and I still believe and I will always believe. It's a confident confession. It's an all in on Jesus confession. She uses every awesome title for Jesus possible. You are the Messiah. The Messiah, the anointed one God promised to send to crush the devil's head and swallow up death forever. You are the Son of God. Not many people said that about Jesus. Jesus didn't correct Martha. Jesus didn't deny this. Jesus just rejoiced at her faith that clearly confessed, "you are the Son of God." The one who is to come into the world. Ok. But this was a very significant confession. The One, the one and only, the one promised by God. The one who was to come was a name for Jesus, the promised Savior. Next week we will hear the people shout, "Blessed is *the one who comes* in the name of the Lord." John the baptist's followers asked Jesus, "Are you *the one who was to come?*" Martha makes this wonderful, amazing, astounding confession, piling up every title for Jesus as the conqueror of death.

It was the words of Jesus that gave this faith to Martha. As amazing as the words and confession of Martha were, the words of Jesus are even more amazing, more astounding. **I am the resurrection and the life.** Jesus is the resurrection, not one resurrection of many. He is the resurrection, the one and only. The only way to rise from the dead is through Jesus. The only way to defeat death is through Jesus. The only way to say the word, "death," without fear is through Jesus. He is the resurrection. He is the life. The one and only way to have eternal life? Jesus. There is no other way. There is no other life. If someone ever tells you, "Get a life." Tell them, "I already have life. I have Jesus." Jesus is more than just life for a few years here on earth. He is that. Jesus is life for all eternity. Jesus is eternal life. Jesus is perfect life. Jesus is life forever.

But now it really gets good. It's a good thing you are sitting down, because these words of Jesus will rock your world. **The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.** Will never die? Will never die? And Jesus said it as emphatically as he possibly could. Will never, ever, ever, ever, ever die, ever! Will never die, ever! How can he say that? Jesus admits physical death will still come. The rate is still constant: one death per person. But whoever lives by believing in Jesus will never see spiritual death, will never see eternal death and will see physical death turned into the way to enjoy and experience real life. Death is turned into life. Death is merely the gate to real living. Physical death just gets rid of this sinful body and puts on a perfect body. Physical death just gets rid of suffering and sadness and sorrow and sickness and enters into a perfect world, with perfect life, with the perfect resurrection and the life, Jesus.

Our socks are knocked off, our worlds are rocked. Will never die? Death defeated? It's hard to believe. That's why Jesus asks, not just Martha, but you, you, one person. Jesus asks you, "Do you believe this?" Well, yeah, of course, I mean, I'm here, I hear it every Sunday. But do you really believe this? When you sat with grandma in the hospital, did you really believe this? When grandpa said before surgery, "It's ok. If I die, I'll just go and be with Jesus," did you really believe him? Have you really gone all in on Jesus, like Martha? Have you really talked resurrection at funerals? When you are dying, will all bets be on Jesus, or will you still be thinking, "I should be ok. I think I've been good enough. I'm pretty sure God will let me in. I mean, no one can every really be sure."

Doubts be gone! Devil be gone! Let faith take center stage. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Those aren't just words. Jesus backed it up. All Jesus had to say was, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out. The dead man came out! How can a dead man come out! This man wasn't dead anymore. Jesus raised him from the dead. Jesus is our conqueror of death. Lazarus didn't need therapy. Lazarus didn't limp out with a walker. Lazarus came out. Alive! Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus is worthy of our full faith, our full confidence, our full assurance. Jesus is our conqueror of death.

There can be no doubts that Lazarus was dead. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Four days. He didn't fall into a coma and revive. He was dead, for four days. There was even this belief at this time that for three days the soul of the person might hang around, but once the fourth day came and the body started to decompose, the soul was gone to its eternal fate. Maybe that was a belief based on the three days the Savior would spend in the tomb before his resurrection, but there can be no doubt, Lazarus was dead. Lazarus was raised. Jesus conquered death for Lazarus. Jesus has conquered death for you.

What Jesus has done for Lazarus, Jesus has done for you. Maybe it's not as spectacular. Maybe it doesn't seem as miraculous, but Jesus conquered death for you. You know, sometimes it takes a death for us to really see God's glory. That's what happened with Lazarus. Certainly Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying. Jesus could have come sooner, before Lazarus died or after Lazarus had been dead a day or two. But Jesus promised that the death of Lazarus would bring God glory. And it certainly did.

Can you think of a death in your life that has brought God glory? I hear some of the clearest confessions of faith at funerals, just like Martha. I hear people say, "I don't know how people can get through this without Jesus." Thank God you don't have to. I have seen people staring death in the face and say, "I'm not afraid. I'm just closer to being with Jesus." That's bringing God glory. I can tell at funerals that people are listening. Not so much at weddings, but at funerals, God really has people's attention. We spend so much of our lives, avoiding, delaying, euphemizing death, but at a funeral we can't ignore it any longer. And here's the good news. We don't have to avoid, delay, euphemize death. We have a conqueror of death. Jesus. We have defeated death, because of Jesus. He is the resurrection and the life. So you will have resurrection and you have life. Amen.