

Our readings today focus our attention to the resurrection. When you listen to them, you will discover that there are two resurrections. The one we think of the most is the promise God makes that those who believe, who die in Christ will be raised to eternal life in heaven. But the Bible also speaks of a resurrection that comes before that, when God raises us up into a new life. This is when he brings us to faith so we are no longer dead sinners, but living believers. This resurrection guarantees that we will be part of the other resurrection.

OLD TESTAMENT: Ezekiel 37:1-14 *Once we were a valley of dry, lifeless bones, but the Spirit miraculously makes us alive.*

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

EPISTLE READING: Romans 8:11-19 *As God raised Jesus from the dead, he raises us up to a glory that makes our present sufferings pale in comparison.*

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

VERSE OF THE DAY: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)*

GOSPEL: John 11:17-27,38-45 *Jesus proves he is the resurrection and the life by raising Lazarus from the dead.*

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two

miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” ... Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

SERMON

John 11:17-27, 38-45

Do You Believe This?

“Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”” (vv. 21-27)

Do you know what I miss nowadays? Well, with the “Stay At Home” order, there is a lot I miss. But I miss going out to eat. I’m not talking the drive-in at McDonald’s, but eating at a nice, sit down, fancy restaurant. I know, it costs three, four or five times more to eat out, but it is nice once in a while. When you do, do you order appetizers? Why do we order appetizers at the restaurant? Think about it. We usually don’t serve appetizers at home. We tell the kids not to eat before dinner because it might ruin their meal, yet we order appetizers at the restaurant. Why? Appetizers taste so good. They get our taste buds all excited. It is part of the experience.

Easter, the most important day for Christians, is only two weeks away. Easter will happen even if we celebrate it in our homes. This year’s Easter may not be quite the same, but don’t let that discourage you from what it means in your life. Our readings today will help get us excited. If Easter is the main meal, today we eat some appetizers. Today we see why Easter is so important, the one thing that makes us so happy. Because Jesus lives, we live, too.

I. Jesus’ compassion for you.

Ever cry at a funeral? I have. Now there may have been funerals where we felt sad, but we didn’t actually shed a tear. Maybe it was the funeral for the 99 year old great aunt of your boss’s second cousin,

and you never met her. You feel for the people, but a tear doesn't fall from your eye. Jesus would have cried. He would cry at every funeral. It is because he cares for every one of us.

We see Jesus full of emotion in our text. That is one of the beauties of Jesus. He puts flesh and blood on God so we can actually see what God is really like. It's not in our reading for today, but this section from John has the shortest passage in the Bible, "**Jesus wept,**" in verse 35. Imagine God terrifying a couple million people at Mt. Sinai with his booming voice. Imagine all those who cringed in fear before God. But here Jesus cried. He didn't just get teary eyed. He wept. Tears were streaming down his cheeks like sweat on a 99 degree sunny day.

But that wasn't the only emotion he had. Not once, but twice in this chapter, it says Jesus was deeply moved. Deeply moved. We may feel that way when your two year old gives you a Mother's Day card. We may feel that way when we watch the victims from a tornado digging through the rubble that was once their home. But Jesus was deeply moved in a different way. You could easily translate this passage as, "Jesus became furious." That is what the Greek says. It has the idea of an animal snorting. Think of that angry bull snorting at you because you waved something red in front of him. Jesus was burning mad.

Why? Because of what sin does to us. He saw how sin brought death to Lazarus. He saw how sin and death brought grief, tears, sorrow, emptiness, and loneliness to Martha and Mary and all those who came to grieve with them. He hates what sin does to us.

This is where it gets interesting. Remember, this is the same Lord who said that death is a wage of sin, something we deserve. This is the same Lord who said in Psalm 5 that he hates sin and those who sin. This is the same Jesus who warns the world that if we don't listen to him, he will judge us and send us to where we belong, that is, hell. We are not victims of sin. We are sinners. We are the cause of sin and all its consequences. God should be furious with us.

Yet, Jesus was also furious at what our sin does to us. It hurts him to see us like this. He doesn't want to see us die. He doesn't want us to live just a few years on earth. He wants us to live with him in heaven.

That is how Jesus feels about us. But Jesus isn't just filled with emotion. It would be wrong, wouldn't it, if you saw a needy person, felt bad for him, and then walked away? Jesus doesn't just feel for us. He actually does something about it.

II. Jesus' power over death.

"“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.””

Jesus is making a very bold statement here. He says he is the resurrection and the life. Ok. I can say my wife is my life, so what? But now he promises that Lazarus will rise from the dead. Now we are curious. What does he mean? Will Lazarus live on in our memories? Then he explains. He promises that anyone who believes in him will live even though he dies. In fact, he promises that we will never die! Ok, Jesus has just crossed the line into the impossible. Of course people die. But Jesus tells us we will never die. How can this be? There would have to be some sort of resurrection, and there is. Jesus promises our bodies will be raised to life as if we never died.

Friends, this is huge. Do we have a sense of complete calm, peace and happiness, or do these words just roll in one ear and out another? When Jesus said, "anyone" who believes, he isn't talking about Lazarus; he is talking about all of us. Is this something you want?

We pray to God for this or that. He wants us to ask for our daily bread, and we do. But do we ask for the big things? What big things? If I take a six year old child to the toy store and ask him, "Now, what do you want," does he just ask for a Snickers bar and that's it? No. Don't just ask God for little things like

more food or better health. Ask God for the big things: forgiveness; peace; to live in heaven; to rise from the dead. We can because Jesus proves he can keep his promise.

Look at what Jesus did for Lazarus. Jesus asked them to roll the stone away and he told Lazarus to come out, and he did. Then Jesus told them to take the burial clothes off of him. Burial clothes do not belong on a live man!

Jesus didn't utter some magical incantation. I could say the same thing at our cemetery and I guarantee you no one will come back to life. It was Jesus' power through those words. His words are so powerful that they enter ears that cannot hear and make a dead person alive again.

Sure, maybe Jesus should have gone around and read each tombstone and told each loved one to come out and live again. That would have made many people happy, but for how long? Think about it. Lazarus isn't walking around today. He eventually died again. It would be neat to see Jesus raise grandma from the dead, but what good will that do us? No, Jesus has to do something else for us. He must fix the very thing that makes us die on earth and hell.

In two weeks it will be Easter when believers all over the world remember and celebrate Jesus coming out of the grave. But don't forget why he died three days earlier on the cross on Good Friday. Now, let me make a bold statement. He died on the cross because he deserved to die. Yes. The Bible is clear: Jesus was tempted in every way like us, but had no sin. That is true. But on the cross he became sin for us, and if the wages of sin is death, well, Jesus had to die because the sins we committed were transferred over to him. He was crushed because of our iniquity. Because he died, we are saved.

Do you believe this? That's the question Jesus asked Martha and he asks us today. To prove we can believe he raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus was going to heaven and Jesus yanked him back to earth. Sure, Lazarus and Mary and Martha were glad to be together again, but Jesus did this really for us. He is proving he means it when he says that anyone who believes will live even though he dies. In fact, it proves we will never die because of the cross and the resurrection. This reading whets our appetite for the main course that follows, Easter.

Is there a chance we can celebrate Easter this year as we always have, with a sunrise service, breakfast, hard boiled eggs, egg hunt, an organ playing, "I Know that My Redeemer Lives," at full volume in a full church? I don't know. God has performed much tougher miracles than this. But if we had to celebrate it while sitting in our homes watching a video service because church remained closed, would we be disappointed? And if so, why? My wife shared something with me from her own personal Bible reading. She read how Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi, beaten, flogged and thrown in jail. Imagine your back ripped open by metal pieces on a whip, exposed, leaning against a cold prison wall. What did they do? They sang hymns; not dirges, but hymns. Notice the joy Christ gives even in circumstances like that. It is good we watched and listened to Jesus at the grave of Lazarus. This is what it is all about. God who hates our sin also hates what our sin does to us. Instead of merely sympathizing with us, he does something about it. He goes to the cross to die for our sins so we live with him in heaven. That is what it is all about. And not even death can get in the way.

Do you believe this? Amen.