

*Resurgam*  
April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014

John 11:17-27, 38-45  
Lent 5 A

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Death is not something we're good at talking about, is it? Sure we can make jokes when we're young and throw an over the hill party with gravestones for our friends when they turn forty (or is it fifty now?) but look out when death is actually a possibility. I mean there's not a much bigger social faux pas than actually suggesting that the elderly person might in fact die someday. Or hinting that it's remotely possible that this terminal illness might actually end in death. We make light of death where we can and avoid talking about it anywhere else. Why are we so awkward and uncomfortable around something that has been around for thousands and thousands of years and happens to absolutely everyone, no exceptions? I can understand being sad about it, after all a person leaves this world in a pretty final way and we're still here. And certainly we want to treat it with a degree of respect. But that doesn't really account for the awkwardness.

Well naturally since, I'm the only one talking here I wouldn't ask the question unless I had an answer to give. And I do have an answer for you. There's a reason we as a culture treat death the way we do, why we act around it how we do. We're scared of it. It is unnatural. It is not what is supposed to be here. Human beings were not created to die. Death is a sickness that has forced itself into our God's creation with the first sin in the Garden of Eden. Physical death is a consequence of sin being in this world. It is a powerful demonstration of the corruption that runs throughout this world. Much like the other signs given in Eden, the way the snake crawls on its belly or how the ground produces weeds or a woman's pain in childbirth; they remind us that this world is broken, they remind us that we are sinners. But none so powerfully as death.

Death is the proof of our sin. Paul sums up the entirety of it very nicely in Romans 5:12 when he writes, "**...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned....**" The fact that each of us dies is a summary statement about our individual lives. It is a slap in the face, a wake-up call to that sinful nature buried in each one of us. That egotistical sinful self that thinks so highly of itself. "I'm so great, look at all the great stuff I do. I could do anything I put my mind to with the strength of my own two hands. I don't need anybody." Death says otherwise. Death says you have not measured up to God's holy standards. Death says you have broken the law and you will die and you are one hundred percent powerless to change this outcome. The sinful nature, so full of itself, is completely powerless before death.

So, it's no surprise that death should be so uncomfortable for us, but is that all there is? Death is just the pronouncement of how badly we've failed and all we can do is sit and stare at it coming for us down the tracks? You and I know the answer to that is no, and we do know why. It's why we come here week after week, it's what we come to hear. But sometimes our confidence wavers, sometimes we need to be powerfully reminded beyond any doubt what death really means for you and for me. For that assurance, I direct our attention to our gospel for today, from John, chapter 11: <Read text: John 11:17-27,38-45>.

I'll be honest with you, part of me wants to just shut up for the next seven or eight minutes and let each of us just marvel at what happened there. But, I also have a sneaky suspicion that I know what's going to happen in our minds after about twenty or thirty seconds. So let's take a closer look. We know from the wider context that Jesus got a message about his friend Lazarus being sick, but rather than going straightaway, he deliberately delays for reasons that become obvious after he is there. As he arrives, Jesus finds that Lazarus has been dead four days already. Martha comes out to meet him. Her speech to Jesus is...unusual. It's mostly positive. She does imply that she believes Jesus has the power to raise her brother from the dead. And yet, when he tells her that her brother will rise again, she speaks of the final resurrection as though she's trying not to get her hopes up that he's talking about here and now.

But it is that confession of the final resurrection and Jesus' response that I want to linger on for just a moment. Because this is really the point of the whole encounter. Martha knows that whatever Jesus chooses to do this day, her brother *will* rise again at the final resurrection. This is a fact embedded in her mind. And Jesus gives us the full truth of the matter in that beautiful passage, "**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.**" (v25,26) This is it for us. This has been what we hold to since we came to believe and trust in Jesus. The simple, straightforward fact that God has the power to overcome death on our behalf. That in Jesus we will not die but we will live. Death is the inevitable conclusion of life for us. By promising us victory over death in Jesus, God has solved our one problem and everything we do in our lives as Christians is done with that truth in mind; that the grave will not hold us and we will rise from it someday by God's power.

Of course, it's enough for us that Jesus made this promise. A promise from God is not like a promise any of us make. Even with the best of intentions and the hardest effort, our promises may still fail because we are extremely limited.

But a promise from God is a fact. In fact, in the eyes of a God who exists outside of time itself, it is more than a fact, it is already an accomplished fact. It is a done deed to him. And that's how we should take the word of God.

But even though Lazarus is promised life eternal and even though Jesus comforts Martha with the truth of the resurrection, he decides today not to leave it at that. He decides that the people who witness this day, ourselves included, would be better served with a demonstration of his power over death. With a simple command, Jesus calls to the dead man from the tomb. Four days he had been in there. This was not a miracle you were going to explain away with any kind of science. We've made some great leaps in medicine, but there's no way someone's coming back after four days under any kind of human power. And yet all Jesus does is call to the man. "**Lazarus, come out!**" (v43). And Lazarus comes out. There was the demonstration of God's power. Death is no impediment to the God of creation. Lazarus was brought to life to prove to us that our God has this power over life and death.

And yet, this amazing miracle would mean nothing without the promise of Christ to go with it. Lazarus was only raised again to more earthly life. But even that was just an extension. He would still die again. What Christ did for him here was not for his benefit, it was for the benefit of his sisters who missed him and more importantly as he himself said it was for the benefit of the witnesses, including us. It was to assure us, to prove to us that Christ is who he said he was and had the power to do what he promised.

Because of Christ, because of his promise to us and the amazing demonstrations of his power over death, we can be assured and know as an accomplished fact that death will not be the end for us. This reached its final fulfillment over Good Friday through Easter Sunday when Christ took our place in death on the cross. His death in our place took away the punishment of death and his resurrection on the third day is our assurance that our earthly death will only be a sleep, a bridge to something far better than this life. Those who trust in him will not die but live forever with him.

You know, when I was in college I had to take Classical Latin for six semesters. I'd actually always kind of wanted to study Latin and my high school, big as it was, didn't offer it. I'll be honest though my enthusiasm waned pretty quickly once I started learning it, and there's not a whole lot of it I remember today anymore, it was a terribly complex language. But that was one thing that impressed me a lot about the language, you could say a lot with very few words. And so today I'd like to share with you a favorite word of mine that is used to express our complete and unwavering confidence in the promise of our God to restore us to life someday. One single Latin word: *resurgam*. Literally translated it comes out as: I will rise again. But I prefer the simple statement in Latin: *resurgam*.

By the promises of Jesus and the demonstrations of his power we have this sure confidence. No matter what happens between now and then, whatever mistakes I make, whatever troubles happen to me, whatever course my life takes, unless the final day comes first, I know that I will die. And because of Jesus I know *resurgam*. I *will* rise again.

Having this confidence and sure trust changes how we perceive and deal with death. Personally, there is no fear of death left because death is a hornet with no stinger. It cannot hurt me because *resurgam*. Can it annoy? Is it still sad when someone we care about dies? Well yes, for the same reason it's sad when they leave us for a long time. We'll miss them. But it's not sad because something bad happened to them. That person will rise again.

That means when two believers in Christ are talking, there is no need to dance around the elephant of death in the room when it's sitting there. Death is not a bad thing. For our loved ones in the Lord who grow old or sick, there is no fear for them or for us. Earthly death, when it comes for them, is not a bad thing, because Christ will raise them up to eternal glory someday. And for us personally, there is no need to fear or to ever be without hope. Because we each will one day pass and we each will rise up again. And there we will be reunited with all those who have gone before that we miss.

Let's not fall into the trap of treating death like some taboo that we can never speak of. Death for the believer is a release from the troubles of this world and the gateway to eternal life. Our God broke the power of death and so it no longer can terrify us. When troubles come and fears creep into our lives, remember the promise of Christ. He is the resurrection and the life. Remember how fully he demonstrated that truth both in raising others from the dead, and most powerfully in his own resurrection, the proof of what is to come for us. In him, I will live even though I die. In him, *resurgam*. In Christ, I will rise again. Amen.