

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'" (John 11:21).

One of the most unsettling aspects of death is that man has no control over it. King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 8(:8), just as ***"no man has power to retain the spirit,"*** so also no man has ***"power over the day of death."***

There is a sobering reality that this life could end at any moment. Job laments: ***"Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not"*** (Job 14:1-2).

And the Psalmist writes: ***"The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away"*** (Psalm 90:10).

One day, we are filled with life, and the next day, we die.

But the wonderful truth is that death does not have to have the final say. Death does not have to be the end. For us Christians, death does not have to be the end of our hopes and dreams. Instead, for us, death can be faced with a joyous anticipation instead of anxious fear, because our Lord conquered death.

Our Lord leaves us with His promise: ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die"*** (John 11:25) and ***"Because I live, you also will live"*** (John 14:19).

For us Christians, death is but ***"the gate to heaven"*** to live with Him on high (Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus, LSB 685). Death is just a portal to perfect fellowship with Christ.

And in today's reading from John 11, Jesus' raising of his friend Lazarus demonstrates His power over death for you.

“Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ... So the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’ But when Jesus heard it He said, ‘This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of Man may be glorified through it’” (John 11:1, 3-4).

Instead of traveling immediately to Bethany, Jesus remained where He was for two days. Jesus then said, ***“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him”*** (John 11:11). Then His disciples said, ***“Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover”*** (John 11:12) – *thinking that Lazarus had just closed his eyes for rest, so to recover from his illness, and that he would awaken in the morning.* Then Jesus said to them plainly: ***“Lazarus has died”*** (John 11:14).

But does Jesus rush to Bethany? No. He remains for two additional days. ***“When Jesus came, He found that Lazarus had been dead in the tomb four days”*** (John 11:17).

We may ask, why would Jesus wait? One explanation is this: He waited for the proper time. He waited for the time that served the best interest of His disciples. You see, by not rushing to prevent Lazarus’ death, He was setting the scene to further strengthen the faith of His disciples. He would show them that He could not just raise a person who had just died, but also rise a person whose body had begun to decay.

Now, “four days” is significant. For it was a Jewish belief that the soul hovered around the body for three days after death, hoping to reenter it. But on the fourth day, after noticing the body beginning to decompose, the soul would depart. Only by the fourth day would a death be considered completely irreversible. Lazarus had been dead for four days and his body was beginning to decompose. Lazarus was dead.

“So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met Him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died’” (John 11:21).

When Martha reached Jesus, she could not keep silent. She had been disturbed for days. Her emotions came pouring out. ***“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”*** Obviously heartbroken, her words also included profound faith and certain hope as she would say, ***“But even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You”*** (John 11:22).

Yes, Martha and Mary were grieving, but they were also grieving in certain hope. Martha has confidence that Jesus has the power to heal. She also knew that Jesus had a special relationship with God. But it did not cross her mind that Jesus could have the power to raise the dead.

Then Jesus says to Martha: ***“Your brother will rise again”*** (John 11:23). For Martha, she understood these words as just calming words of assurance, like the other mourners. But what Jesus meant was that He was going to raise Lazarus immediately.

Martha was familiar with the hope of the resurrection, so she said to Jesus, ***“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day”*** (John 11:24).

Then Jesus says to Martha: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*** (John 11:25-26).

Those words of Jesus have soothed many troubled hearts at a deathbed, during a funeral, and at a gravesite. Whoever clings to Jesus – *even though death makes its unwelcome earthly visit* – will live!

Now, Martha was stuck in the trauma of the past. Her mind was on the hope of the future. But she was not thinking about the present. But time is of no obstacle for the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus will raise the dead on the last day, and He is going to raise her brother Lazarus in moments.

Jesus then takes Martha out of the past, and out of the future, but to Himself. He asks, “Do you believe that I am the Resurrection and the Life?”

Emphatically, Martha says ***“Yes, Lord; I believe”*** (John 11:27).

Martha believed. Jesus was the object of her faith. She believed Jesus was the Christ. She believed He was the One who was to come into the world. She confessed her faith in Jesus as the Savior, the promised Messiah. Such faith gave her the life that overcomes death.

What about you? Jesus also asks us this day: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though He die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*** (John 11:25-26).

This is the question. This is the question Jesus asks everyone.

So, what does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life? It means none other than to fear, love, and trust in Him. It means that by faith in Him, you will live forever and never die. It means that you possess the resurrection now. It means that on the day of your death, you will merely fall asleep in the certain hope that Jesus will wake you up again.

And how much faith do you need to possess the resurrection? The faith that of a mustard seed. Even with that measure of faith, the believer possesses all that Jesus offers!

Jesus is the only source of resurrection and life!

And if you have any doubts, Jesus has come to give us confidence and assurance this day through His Word and His Sacrament. You see, Jesus is here. He says to our troubled hearts, ***“Peace be with you”*** (John 20). He says to our troubled hearts, *“Take, eat”* and *“Take, drink,”* *“This is My body; This is My blood ... for the forgiveness of your sins.”* And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is eternal life and salvation!

So, just as Jesus called Lazarus from His four-day deathly slumber in the tomb, through His gift of faith to you, He will wake you up on the Last Day! Because Jesus lives, you shall also live! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +