

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'The Resurrection and the Life'
John 11:17-44
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By Keith Marcy

When Jesus was ministering on earth, every day was a busy day. Crowds followed Him. Some were curious, *'What is this Man about?'* Others wanted to witness the excitement of seeing another cripple walk, another blind person made to see, the deaf made to hear and another leper restored to perfect health. A few listened with keen interest to His teaching. And the religious clergy listened for things He said that would give them reason to accuse Him of blasphemy – lying about God.

Jerusalem had become a hot spot for Jesus. The Jewish council was waiting an opportunity to kill Him. Not surprisingly then, we find Jesus and the 12 ministering in a sparsely populated area across the Jordan River. In Bethany, a small town about 2 miles from Jerusalem, lived a family comprised of two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. Many times, they had opened their home to Jesus and His disciples. Jesus became close to them, calling them *'friends.'* Lazarus became seriously ill and his condition degraded steadily. This was centuries before x-rays, CT scans and antibiotics.

The worried sisters sent a messenger to tell Jesus, *"Your friend Lazarus is sick. Please come!"* Jesus stayed where He was, across the Jordan for two more days.

Lazarus died.

Jesus, being God in the confines of a human body, knew he had died. He announced to His disciples, *"Lazarus has died. I will go and raise him up."* The disciples are horrified, *"Have you lost your memory, Jesus? Bethany is 2 miles from Jerusalem. The religious Jews are looking for a chance to kill you!"* When it was obvious Jesus would not change course, Thomas, frustrated, said to the others, *"We may as well go along and die with Him!"*

Unhurriedly, they made their way toward Bethany. Meanwhile a funeral was held for Lazarus, and his body was embalmed with spices, wrapped around and around with strips of cloth and laid in a cave-like tomb. A stone was rolled across the opening and sealed with mud. Many Jews from Jerusalem were staying with Mary and Martha to mourn and comfort them in their loss.

When Jesus was still outside their town, someone ran ahead, burst into the house, *"Jesus is coming!"* Martha hurried to meet Him. Her greeting was mingled with frustration, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* She was feeling

like we feel when we wait for weeks for an MRI or hours in an emergency waiting room. Only she felt worse; her friend had let her down.

Jesus replied, *"Martha, your brother will rise again!"*

Martha answered, *"I know he will rise in the resurrection at the last day."*

Perhaps her unspoken words were, *"But you could have healed him, and we would still have him!"*

Jesus said, *"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."*

What did Jesus mean?

The statement seems to be contradictory. Let's examine it.

"I am the resurrection and the life."

We can say it like this, *"I have the power and the authority to resurrect a dead body and give it life again."*

He has the power because He is God.

Almost 33 years earlier the angel Gabriel announced to Mary who was to become the mother of Jesus that *"nothing is impossible with God."*

Jesus also said, *"I am the life..."* In John 1:1-4 we read that Jesus was active in creating the universe. He created the body for Adam from the dust of the ground. Adam lay there fully and intricately formed, but lifeless – until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7) and man became a living being!

The body, in all its amazing detail, came alive. Man, now has a soul – a controlling spiritual part. The soul controls the body – it makes him or her gently hold a child – **or** – hit a person with the intent to kill. It makes his mouth utter kind words of encouragement – **or** – insult, criticize and discourage. So, we see that a person has two distinct parts – a physical body and a spiritual soul.

Jesus goes on to speak of both parts. *"He who believes in me will live even though he dies."* A person's soul receives the new birth, a new set of values, a new code of conduct when it believes that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. This soul will live on even though the physical body in which that soul lives, dies.

"And whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

But we all know that bodies die. We grow old, we wear out and we stop breathing. The physical body dies. The spirit, however, does not die. The real person – the part that showed kindness, encouragement, love, concern, generosity does not die but joins other believers in a land of splendour and beauty in the very presence of God.

Let us then enlarge Jesus' statement. *"I have the power to raise the dead and give new life. He who believes in me with his soul will live, even though his body dies, and*

whoever lives for me and believes in me with his soul, will never die even though their body wears out and dies."

"Martha, do you believe this?"

"Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God who was to come into the world."

Keith, do you believe this?

Nora, do you believe this?

Laurie? Cheryl? Debbie? Margaret?

Put your name there.

Do you, with your spirit, believe what the Bible says about Jesus – everything it says about Him?

Then, based on Jesus' own words, you will never die even though your body dies.

Jesus is not done yet.

"Take me to Lazarus' tomb."

"Roll the stone away."

Martha protests, *"No. We cannot do that. He has been in the tomb for 4 days. His body is already decomposing."*

Jesus said, *"Did I not tell you, that if you believed, you would see God's glory?"*

They rolled the stone aside.

Jesus called in a loud voice, *"Lazarus, come out!"*

Lazarus came out. His body was whole. Re-made – the same age, the same looks, the same voice as before he died.

Yes, Jesus, You proved You have power to resurrect Your own to take what was dead and make it alive. Jesus has just given us a glimpse into the future – His second coming, and the wonder that will accompany that event.

Next week we continue this theme, looking at Paul's explanation in the following passages. If you read them, the sermon will be easier to follow next week.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 12-25, 35-45, 50-58.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.