

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Lent 5A  
March 26, 2023  
John 11:1-53

### True Comfort for Those Facing Death

[Jesus said,] "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 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And so we do. But do we mean it? What happens when God doesn't do what we want Him to do, or refuses to help the way we want? Mary and Martha want Jesus to come to Bethany to heal Lazarus and save him from death. But, Jesus doesn't rush to get there. He takes His time. Lazarus dies and Jesus doesn't even make it to the funeral. Jesus finally shows up four days after Lazarus is dead and buried.

So, what about us? We pray to Jesus to make us well, take away this pain, heal my child or spouse or friend, let me do well on this test, make my business successful, fix my marriage, my friendships, don't let this dear one die. But sometimes Jesus doesn't give us what we want. Sometimes, He refuses to help the way we want Him to help. What then?

When Jesus finally does arrive in Bethany, Martha goes to meet Him. What's she going to say? Is she going to berate Jesus for not coming and not helping? No. She simply says, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Yet, she also said, "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

When Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again," Martha confessed, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the

last day." Then Jesus spoke words we know and cherish, "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?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

She immediately went to tell Mary that Jesus was there. When Mary arrived where Jesus was, she said the same thing Martha had said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Was this a "you're too late" statement? Was it resignation that Jesus didn't really care?

After all, He doesn't appear very comforting. He wasn't there when Lazarus was sick and dying. All they had was whatever comfort the other women might offer. And what might that be? Maybe like what we hear in our day. If I did something wrong or messed up, someone says, "Oh, that's OK, everyone does that." So! What comfort is that? I've harmed someone, I've failed to do what I should, I haven't done what the Lord requires of me, "Oh, that's OK, everyone does that." Such false comfort is no comfort at all.

Something similar happens when someone dies. Someone, meaning well, will say, "He was a good man. She was a good woman." But it's a lie. No one is good except God. Where's the comfort? Goodness doesn't make him or her any less dead. But we may say such things, because we know comfort is needed and we're desperately looking for something.

"He looks so peaceful." Or, even worse, "He looks so natural." So, the cold, dead body looks nice—this isn't real comfort, it's just makeup—he's still dead.

"She's become an angel." No, that's a myth. It's not true. No human becomes an angel at death. We don't become ghosts, and we don't come back to earth in another body. Another worthless platitude.

"He lived a full life." No, he didn't. Even 90, even 100 years, even 110. That's not a full life; we were made to live without ever dying.

You see, Death is an awful enemy. We're afraid of it. We whisper "death" or say all sorts of euphemisms to avoid even saying "death" or "died"—shamefully treating death with more reverence than the Lord's Name. To con ourselves into thinking death isn't coming our way, we cling to our youth, we work ourselves into a frenzy to look young, act young, nip and tuck, lift and stretch, on and on.

Forget it. Give up the false myths. Give up the false comfort. Give up the false expectations that Jesus should make everything go easy in your life. Face the truth: you're a sinner. You deserve death and hell and everything awful. Jesus doesn't owe you anything.

And now, receive real comfort—Jesus, true God, true man comes to save you.

Jesus, your true human brother, always knows your suffering and trouble. He endured it all. He was tempted in every way as you are. He saw and breathed death and its stench. And because of it, Jesus mourned. He broke down in tears at Lazarus' grave. He hears your every cry to Him as you trust in Him. He knows you—he knows absolutely everything about you. He knows what you really need. And He gives it. Listen.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

These are not cute, empty words—another false attempt to try to soothe our sadness. These are the powerful, true, certain words of the Lord who created us, and who backed up these words with action. He raised Lazarus from the grave, just by His words, "Lazarus, come out!" Yet, these words—I am the Resurrection and the Life—are costly words for Jesus. To give life to us who deserve only death, Jesus takes our death on Himself. He takes your sin into Himself—all of it. He takes your death into His body. He dies as you and I and all people do. But death cannot hold Him, the holy, perfect, innocent, eternal Son of God. He breaks death's jaws. He makes every grave on earth like His own, not a final resting place, but a temporary one.

And those who trust in Jesus will live—their soul forever, their body again for good on the last day. "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

It is the same Jesus, the same One who is the Resurrection and the Life, who brought His church to life from death. St. Paul rightly reminds us, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). So away with the empty comfort that "everyone does it. Everyone makes that same mistake. Relax." Receive the powerful word commanded by Christ Jesus who paid our sins' debt: "I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit."

In the face of our awful enemy death, hear the powerful Word of the Lord, that in Holy baptism, Christ's death has become your death, and His resurrection is yours.

Jesus gives real comfort in our trouble, fear, sin, and death. He is the resurrection and the life.

Ironically, for His miracle of raising Lazarus Jesus will be crucified. The Jewish leaders are panicked. Jesus is drawing bigger crowds. How do they stop Him? Caiaphas says, "'You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.' He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."

Here is abundant, real comfort for us. Jesus does die for all people from all nations, for you! And Jesus comes among us to comfort us in our need, our sorrow, our fear, our grief, our death. He comes in His body which was crucified and risen from the dead. He comes among us that He "would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad." He lives, and He will keep us in Him to life everlasting. He is your only true comfort. He is the resurrection and the Life for you.

Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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