

## “I AM the Resurrection and the Life”

✠ “Do you believe this?” (vv.17-27)

✠ “You will see the glory of God.” (vv.38-45)

In the name of Jesus, who is **the Resurrection and the Life**, dearly redeemed family of God:

One thing we all have in common – young or old, boy or girl, man or woman. Everyone has fear. The big difference is how we deal with fear. Most people choose to ignore it. Fill your life with fun, frolic and pleasure; then there won't be much time to fear. But that works only as long as the health holds out and the bank account is full. Reality bites – with fear. Some try to face their fears alone without God. But that's like whistling in a graveyard. Today we see two sisters, Mary and Martha, at the grave of their brother Lazarus. They will ignore their fear and deal with the real problem: sin. Watch how they deal with their sin by coming to their Savior. Listen as Jesus says, “**I AM the Resurrection and the Life**”...

✠ “Do you believe this?” (vv.17-27)

Religion has done a lot of damage to people's faith. Most religion today is busy messing up people's minds and hearts by confusing faith and feelings, or faith and reason. Both do terrible damage, increasing fear. God says, faith like the salvation it receives “*is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*” (Ephesians 2:8f) So if you feel your faith is weak, then try to strengthen it by saying over and over to yourself, “I believe. I believe. I believe!” you're not strengthening your faith. You're increasing your fear. If you decide you're going to believe, you don't have faith. You have a decision. Only God can give you faith through what one of our Seminary professors likes to call, “the un-religion.”

You see, sin has us running away from God in fear. But God calls us like Adam in the garden, “Where are you?” God knows where we've been hiding. He wants us to turn around and ask, “Where am I in my relationship to God?” God keeps calling. He wants us to listen. As soon as you start coming, you are converted, i.e., turned around. God's gift of faith comes complete with His all-forgiving grace. Keep coming; God will build your faith. But be sure of this. It will be in His own time and His own way.

Jesus received word from the sisters that His friend Lazarus was sick. Then He waited several days to arrive after “*Lazarus [had] already been in the tomb four days.*” Didn't Jesus know Lazarus would die? Yes, He did. Couldn't Jesus have come sooner? Yes, He could. This is where fear sets in and destroys the faith of some. If God does not answer where and when I want, my natural reaction is anger, maybe hurt. They're twin cousins. Then comes the fear that maybe God does not care. Or does He have the power to help? Either way, many turn away from God and fall into fear forever.

Jesus did not come to the house. He let Martha come out to Him. Again, many folks would be offended. But Jesus knew the commotion at the house with all the relatives and mourners sobbing and crying. He wanted to speak to Martha alone, just as He wants you alone with Him. If you are a little child, Jesus wants to hold you close to His loving heart. If you are a father or mother, aunt or uncle, grandpa or grandma – Jesus wants you alone with Him. He never deals with our fears like a mass of empty faces. He knows us each by name. He wants us one-on-one.

Martha could have stayed away, locked in fear. But her brother was already dead. She could not change that. So she brought her fear to Jesus and laid it all on Him: “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” How did Martha know that? Because she had already heard and seen how Jesus could heal the sick and raise the dead, like the widow's son at Nain and the son of the official at Capernaum. Her faith said, “Jesus could do it.” Her fear asked, “Why weren't you here?” Then her faith spoke again, “*But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.*” What did Martha mean by that? Was she hoping for a miracle? She did not say. She just conquered her fear by hoping in God.

Whenever we put our hope in God through His Son Jesus Christ, He shows that He is the Master of fear and the Author of faith. What Christ begins, He will finish in the fearless power of faith. Now that Martha has ignored her fear and come to God, Jesus goes to work on her faith. ***“Your brother will rise again,”*** He says. ***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?”***

Dear friends, you will never make yourself believe this. If you investigate with your keenest logic and dive in with human reason, you will only find that dead is dead. But Jesus is not just talking about bodies. He’s talking about your soul. ***“He who believes in me will live, even though he dies”*** because by faith our soul goes on living after death. ***“And whoever lives and believes in me”*** – living by faith in our soul now, soul and body raised again on the Last Day – living and believing in Jesus, you will ***“never die”*** – never again physically, and certainly not the second death in hell. Such faith is not a decision. It is not a calculation. It is ***“a gift of God”*** in the un-religion that looks to God to conquer fear and doubt.

Martha had received that gift by listening to Jesus. God’s Word creates faith when and where God pleases. So when the question came, she could answer honestly and without hesitation: ***“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”*** And that faith, dear friends, conquers fear. Such faith rests in the loving arms by the warm heart of God. Now...

### ✠ ***“You will see the glory of God.”*** (vv.38-45)

One sister up; two more to raise. Mary heard from Martha that Jesus had come. So she hurried out with her fear to find the answer for her faith. ***“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*** Mary does not add what Martha’s faith said about God giving Jesus whatever He asked. He saw her crying along with the crowd. God the Creator was in the valley of the shadow of death with His fallen creatures. This violent intrusion into His perfect creation. This savage severing of loved ones apart. This was not the way God meant it to be. Adam’s sin brought death and sorrow and suffering into God’s perfect world. Now without fear, with total faith in God His Father and His own power to save, Jesus asked, ***“Where have you laid him?”*** In the Bible’s shortest verse: ***“Jesus wept.”*** (11:35) Don’t ever fear that grief and mourning are wrong. Bring it all to God who weeps with you.

His heart was pounding, His spirit stirred up, as Jesus came to the tomb. Nothing stood in the way of His power, but the stone blocked their sight. Such is the problem today. Stone cold hearts fear God may not have the power. Or if He has the power, they fear He may not have the love to help. Please, dear fearful heart, turn back to God and see His grace. Martha did not ask. Mary did not make this request. They didn’t dare. What Jesus is about to do is far beyond all expectation. Reason says, “He stinketh. He’s a four-dayer. Jesus, you don’t want to see and smell a corpse that dead.” ***“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”*** Jesus prays to our Father in heaven for the sake of the crowd ***“that they may believe that you sent me.”*** And then He calls, ***“Lazarus, come out!”***

The body was bound, hands and feet, with a wrap around his face to hold the dead body fluids from nose and mouth. Reason screams, “You can’t walk like that!” Faith cries, “That’s right! But Jesus said, ‘Come out!’ Death must yield and the body obey, unbound by gravity. ***“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”*** Jesus beats back fear when He conquers death and hell and the grave.

Only a few more days, and Jesus will do it again forever and for all. Lazarus and his delighted sisters, clinging to his arms, tears streaming with joy – the family lived very near Jerusalem. But a few more days and Jesus would ride into the city like a humble King to die. And what He did for Lazarus, He would do for you, for me, for all. He raised Himself from the dead. Forget your fear. Deal with your sin as you kneel at the cross of your Friend and Savior Jesus Christ. ***“You will see the glory of God”*** in His bleeding, dying love for you, love that lives again. ***“I AM the Resurrection and the Life...whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”*** Lord, conquer our fear in the warm fires of faith. Amen.