

John 11:17-27

July 29, 2013 – Funeral: Walter E. Gross

S#1476

CW 411

Pastor Mark A. Cordes

## “I AM the Resurrection and the Life”

In the name of Jesus, our risen and living Savior, dear loved ones of Walter Gross, all loved by God:

When a young person dies, people naturally ask, “Why so soon?” When an elderly man dies after a long illness, we can’t help asking, “Why so long?” We want him back, but not in suffering. So we naturally question God. God is so patient and kind that He gives us many answers. God helps us see that He was listening to the prayers of all who loved Walter, guiding his life as promised, eighty-eight years.

In family records we discovered Dad Gross had diphtheria, which could have taken his youth. Walter’s parents and family prayed. They prayed when he went off to war to fight for our country in the Pacific. Only he and his shipmates knew when their destroyer was tossed about like a tin can on a typhoon that would not let up for days. But his mother and sisters, Walter himself, kept praying. And God heard. Accidents never happened. Illnesses never came. God kept guiding and blessing tirelessly as He loves to do through bouts of cancer that could have taken Walter from us decades ago. But Jesus Himself and the dear Holy Spirit pray for us. God our Father listens and times everything for our good.

Sometimes it’s hard to see that in your life. That’s why I find it so comforting how the dear Holy Spirit caused this account to be recorded in the Bible. Jesus would never have had to suffer through *“the valley of the shadow of death”* if He had chosen to stay in the bright lights of heaven. Instead, from eternity Jesus volunteered to come also for this dear family of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. Through the ages countless Christians have found comfort and peace in Jesus at the Bethany cemetery.

Most of you already know at least bits and pieces of this story. Word came to Jesus across the Jordan in Perea: *“Lord, the one you love is sick.”* Jesus waited a few days and confused His disciples when He said, *“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”* After Jesus talked about going to wake Lazarus from sleep, He plainly told them, *“Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”* (11:1-16) Jesus went back to Jerusalem under death threats in order to comfort us today.

Our text picks up where Martha is asking, “What took you so long?” Mary has the same question. The crowds criticize: *“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”* It’s no accident that the shortest verse in the Bible is right here: *“Jesus wept.”* (11:35) People don’t realize how death grieves God. Death is a violent intrusion into God’s perfect creation. God never intended it to be this way. God says that *“he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”* (Lamentations 3:33) Christ came to conquer our worst fears and dispel our deepest doubts.

Everyone here has suffered through personal trials and tribulations that the rest of us can only try to understand. Wherever you have conquered a job challenge, tough test, military combat, or whatever, you’ve grown stronger. Some say, “If it doesn’t kill you, it makes you stronger.” But death is the enemy none of us can overcome on our own. Jesus the Son of God walked right into that cemetery and said, *“Take away the stone.”* Martha objected, *“But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”* But Jesus reminded her: *“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”* *Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”* *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”* This was the third time Jesus raised someone from the dead. And on the third day, as promised for ages, Jesus would raise Himself on Easter morning.

Jesus was not boasting when He said to Martha, *“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.”* God

reveals to us in the Bible that when the first man, Adam, sinned, we all died. The whole mass of humanity was going down with the ship because ***“the wages of sin is death.”*** But God is not willing that anyone should perish. He wants everyone to enjoy everlasting life with Him in the bliss of heaven. So while ***“the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 6:23) Since Jesus died and rose again, the only question is what He asked Martha, ***“Do you believe this?”*** If you are convinced, as I am, and as Walter is, that Jesus is your Savior, Jesus says, ***“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*** (John 5:24) Our eternal life has already begun by faith. Now God has made death into a sleep from which we wake up in glory. All who trust in Jesus as their personal Savior will never suffer the second death of eternal hell. Jesus died for you. He wants you alive with Him.

Personally, I believe we are better off than Jesus’ friend Lazarus. After Jesus raised him to life, Lazarus became a popular attraction but also a target as Jesus’ enemies plotted to kill Lazarus too. Christian tradition says Lazarus and his sisters fled persecution in Jerusalem during the time of the apostles. Lazarus had to put up with troubles of this life all over again. But he willingly lived for God.

That’s the lesson for each of us whenever a loved one dies believing in Jesus. Our Lord does not say, “I give the resurrection.” ***“I AM the resurrection.”*** We are connected to Christ by our Baptism – in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We already enjoy new life in Christ. He also says, ***“I AM...the life.”*** All the enjoyment of God blessings on earth and in heaven are wrapped up in God’s greatest Gift: the suffering, death and resurrection of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

One preacher’s son, late 1800’s, refused to believe this. Robert Ingersoll was a politician who took great pride in ridiculing Christianity. Ingersoll told this story: “I was never nonplused but once. One night I was lecturing...to show that the resurrection of Lazarus was probably a planned affair to bolster the waning fortunes of Jesus. Lazarus was to take sick and die. The girls were to bury him and send for Jesus. Lazarus was to feign death until Jesus should come and say, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ To emphasize the situation, I said: ‘Can anyone tell me why Jesus said, “Lazarus, come forth?”’ Down by the door a pale-faced man rose and with a shrill voice said: ‘Yes, I can tell you. If my Lord had not said, “Lazarus,” he would have had the whole graveyard of Bethany coming out to him.”<sup>1</sup> Must have been an old janitor who had enough of Ingersoll’s pointy-headed academic unbelief. Who are you going to believe, God or man?”

On the Last Day, Jesus will not say, “Lazarus...” He will simply call out in a loud voice, ***“Come forth!”*** Every grave will empty out. Scoffers who had their ashes scattered to the winds will discover to their horror that the Creator who made those molecules can gather them again. Believers who died at sea will find that God is so powerful, so loving He will resurrect their body as promised, glorify it like Jesus’ body as promised, and bring all His loved ones home to bliss and glory as promised. Think about this. Since Jesus was willing to suffer and die as promised, He certainly will bring us home to heaven.

This body is described in our 1 Corinthians 15 Lesson, as a ***“tent.”*** We long to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, forever young like Jesus’ resurrected body. He can eat, but He does not have to. He can rest as you do on vacation while doing the fun things you enjoy. But all will be with God in His light, enjoying the energy of those who are young forever. The next time we see dear Walter Gross, he will be smiling, healthy, stronger than we remember him, clothed with his eternally youthful body that cannot ever again grow old. For when Christ comes again as promised and makes everything new, ***“there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*** ***“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.”*** (Revelation 21:3f)

For now, like Lazarus, Mary and Martha, we seek our Lord Jesus in the one thing needful, God’s holy Word. He will comfort and sustain us home to glory in His own good time. God loves to guide and bless all who call on Him with humble, repentant hearts. Glory be to Jesus for His wonderful life. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Rein, R.C. *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*. Milwaukee, WI: NPH, 1983, ref. 1271.