

I AM the Resurrection and the Life

John 11:25-27

INTRODUCTION

In March of 1992, a very unusual letter made the national news. Perhaps you remember hearing about it. It had been sent by the Indiana Department of Social Services. The letter read:

Dear Sir:

This letter will notify you that, effective April 1, 1992, your monthly allotment of food stamps will be discontinued. We are taking this action after having received notice that you have died.

If there happens to be a change in your circumstances, you may reapply by contacting this department at the address provided below.

May God bless you.

If there happens to be a change in circumstances! Well, you and I are here on this day to celebrate one such "change in circumstances."

In the words of the Nicene Creed which we will recite together in a few moments, we have gathered because:

For our sake (Jesus) was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again. (*Nicene Creed*)

His circumstances changed!

There have been a few others whose circumstances changed, but not many. One such person was a man named Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha and a good friend of Jesus. His story is told in John 11. In fact, you might remember that I introduced that story in this series of sermons two weeks ago when I talked about how we respond when it seems like God has become silent and unresponsive to our prayers. I called those times "stumbling in the dark.:"

I want to refer back to that story of the resurrection of Lazarus for a brief moment so that I can introduce to the last of the seven I AM statements of Jesus:

Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

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. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe ... (John 11:17-28)

In that story Jesus then had a similar conversation with Martha's sister Mary.

- He listened to the ridicule of the professional mourners who had gathered near.
- He even had His own private moment of grief.

But then as He stood in front of the opened grave of his friend ...

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.” (John 11:43-44)

Lazarus didn't need those grave clothes anymore. His circumstances changed!

Under ordinary everyday circumstances things like resurrections don't happen. I doubt seriously that dead man in Indiana ever successfully won a case for reinstatement of his food stamps. But when Jesus gets involved, the circumstances are no longer “ordinary” or “every day.”

I AM the resurrection and the life.

No one else could say that! Ever! I certainly can't. Neither can you. And if we tried everyone would know we were a fraud. But Jesus can.

- And because He can make that statement, you and I have gathered here 2,000 years later where we continue to celebrate the fact that the only One who CAN make that statement, DID make it, and then made it happen in His own life.
- In other words, we are here BECAUSE HE LIVES.

Our presence here now requires from us THREE OBLIGATIONS.

OBLIGATION #1: BELIEVE IT

When Jesus made that statement beside the grave of Lazarus, He asked Martha a simple question:

Do you believe? (John 11:26)

The angels at the empty on that first Easter reminded the women:

He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. (Matthew 28:6)

He told you this was going to happen! Believe it! What Jesus did is so staggering that it might seem beyond belief. It might be viewed as too good to be true. But every page of the Scriptures prepares us to receive it and to believe it.

There are still many people in this world who hesitate to take Jesus at His word. They find this whole resurrection stuff a little hard to believe. And who can blame them?

- The women who went to the tomb that first Easter Sunday did not go expecting to find a resurrection. They went to embalm a dead body.
- Likewise the disciples had to be convinced – even though they had traveled with Jesus and heard Him teach over and over again. He didn't even conceal it in fancy parables:

When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." (Matthew 17:22-23)

Yet it happened! On the third day even!

A cemetery in Hanover, Germany has a grave on which were placed huge slabs of granite and marble cemented together and fastened with heavy steel clasps. The grave belongs to a woman who refused to believe that Jesus could make anyone rise from the dead. To make sure it didn't happen to her, in her will, she gave orders to the cemetery that her grave be made so secure that if there were a resurrection, it could not reach her.

The marker was inscribed with a court order, in keeping with her last wishes. The order read: "By order of the court, this burial place must never be opened."

Over time, a seed that had been covered over by the stones, began to grow. Slowly it pushed its way through the soil and out from beneath those marble slabs. As the trunk enlarged, the great slabs were gradually shifted. First the steel clasps were wrenched from their sockets. Then that tiny seed became a tree that pushed aside the huge slabs.

The dynamic life force contained in that little seed is a faint reflection of the tremendous power of God's Word: I AM the resurrection and the life. Believe it!

OBLIGATION #2: SHARE IT

Matthew 28:7 reveals this obligation. After the angels had told the women that Jesus was risen, they quickly shared these words:

Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." (Matthew 28:7)

When we know the truth of the resurrection in our own lives, our first obligation is to share it with someone else.

Tony was a 16-year-old young man who was applying for a job as an usher at a theater in the mall. As a part of the interview process, the manager asked him, "Tony, what would you do in case a fire breaks out while you are at work?"

Confident that he knew the right answer Tony quickly answered, "You don't have to worry about me. I could get out just fine."

What a classic answer! Isn't that descriptive of how many in today's world respond to a culture that needs to know the truth about Jesus? If you were to ask them

"What would you do if Jesus came back tomorrow?" they would probably respond, "Oh, don't worry about me. I'd be fine."

But what is all too easy to forget is that you're an usher! It isn't enough just to get out yourself. You are responsible for helping others know the way. And the way is simple enough to communicate:

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Point them to Jesus. Ask them to ...

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

OBLIGATION #3: REJOICE

Look at verse 9:

Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. (Matthew 28:9)

The word Jesus uses in this greeting literally means "rejoice!" And we have rejoiced in the truth of this day for 2000 years!

- What a contrast from Good Friday! That last time we were in this sanctuary for worship we left in tears.
- All was dark and mournful.
- We drove nails deep into the cross of Christ

But today we rejoice!

- Not because we get lots of candy
- Not just because we get to be with family and friends
- Not just because we get to eat lots of ham, mashed potatoes and noodles.

We rejoice because people like Professor Thomas Arnold, author of the famous *History of Rome* and a retired chair of modern history at Oxford said:

"I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

We rejoice because Brooke Foss Westcott, an English scholar, said:

"Raking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

We rejoice because

Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed!

Amen