

Sunday, March 29, 2020
Faith Lutheran Church
Marion, Iowa
Pastor John Albertson



Faith
LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA

5 Lent A

We worship as we live in the strong name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us pray: O God, full of compassion, we commit and commend ourselves to you, in whom we live and move and have our being. Be the goal of our pilgrimage, our rest by the way. Give us refuge from the turmoil of worldly distractions beneath the shadow of your wings. Let our hearts, so often a sea of restless waves, find peace in you, O God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 11 chapter.

John 11

11Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' ⁸The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' ⁹Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' ¹¹After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' ¹²The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming; she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' ²³Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life.** Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. **Do you believe this?**

These days are taxing for the one who believes. There is a lot of information to take in. Life is changed for the moment. **“Wash your hands”** has become the motto of the moment. Worry and fret are the new normals. “Will I get sick?” “Will I run out?” “Will there be enough?” “Will there be a cure?” “How much of normal life will be put on hold or pushed back?” We are living in a time that is full on unknowns.

Mary and Martha were living with the unknown in today’s Gospel. Lazarus has died and they cannot reach Jesus. Fear, anger, and grief take over. Mary speaks words of **anguish**: **“If only you would have been here.”** She speaks words of **defeat**. **“If only you would have been here.”** She speaks words of anger and **blame**. **“If only you would have been here.”**

Someone once said, **“We crucify ourselves between two thieves,** regret for yesterday and fear of tomorrow.” The season of Lent calls us to turn from our sin and live. Let go of the past littered with mistakes and sins and face our tomorrows with confidence in God’s grace and love.

“If only” words get in the way. They get in the way of healing. **“If only** words bog us down.” **“If only** words leave us empty.” Living in the land of “if only” leads to certain death for in this land regret and punishment rule the day.

Into this land—into our present situation—the one the world now faces—comes the One who promises to deliver us—Jesus Christ. **“I am the**

resurrection and the life he says.” Jesus is the bringer of “another chance.”

If we have been reminded of anything these past weeks it is the realization that **we are not in control**. We cannot predict the future. We may be in this situation for a long time. Jesus announces to us that by grace we have a future that is made known to us today. **“I am.”**

Listen again: Martha says to Jesus, “Lord if you would have been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you anything you ask of him. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. **Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life.”**

This is a claim that only John makes. “I am” right now.

What does this mean for you today? When you get caught up in the toilet paper shortage and start to feel down, take a time out and meditate on Jesus promise: “I am” right now.

Come clean with the smell of sin. The stink of death. The season of Lent invites us to **open the doors of our individual tombs**—shake off the grave clothes of death and doubt and unbelief. Get rid of that which holds you captive so that Christ may be born again in you and in this world.

As the beloved Christmas hymn reminds us: “No more let sin and sorrow grow nor thorns infest the ground, he comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found.”

The words of Jesus at the end of John 11 are powerful indeed, “Unbind him and let him go.” Jesus has removed the shackles and chains, the cloth of

death from Lazarus and he promises to do the same for us. “I am the resurrection and the life, right now.”

God broke the shackles of the Israelites living in bondage in Egypt through the work of God’s servant Moses. **God sent the judges and the prophets**, to guide the people to a better life and understanding. The people of Ezekiel’s day were living in a land without hope, they were living in despair. But Ezekiel declares that God will breathe new life into the community once more...”**These dry bones will live!**”

Take heart dear friends—God will break through the chains that bind us—a new day will come—a new chance will be given.

What Jesus said to Martha, he says to you, “I am.” “I am the resurrection and the life.” Today. Not somewhere, sometime in the future. Today. “Today you shall be with me in paradise.”

Amen.