

## Sermon for March 22, 2026 – Lent 5

John 11:17-27,38-45 EHV

Theme: Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

- 1) He comforts us in our grief
- 2) He calls us from death to life

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

<sup>18</sup>Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. <sup>19</sup>Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother.

<sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary was sitting in the house.

<sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

<sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

<sup>24</sup>Martha replied, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the Last Day."

<sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies. <sup>26</sup>And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord," she told him. "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

<sup>38</sup>Jesus was deeply moved again as he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>"Take away the stone," he said.

Martha, the dead man's sister, told him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, because it has been four days."

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone.

Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

<sup>44</sup>The man who had died came out with his feet and his hands bound with strips of linen and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus told them, "Loose him and let him go."

<sup>45</sup>Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what Jesus did believed in him.

What should I say to a friend who has lost a loved one?

"I'm so sorry for your loss." "He was a good man." "He's in a better place." – As nice as these familiar phrases sound, they don't offer any real relief.

Even better statements, like "He is with Jesus," and "He will rise again," can't fully remove a person's grief. As comforting as those words are, they don't change the fact that their loved one isn't present with them now. That is the source of their sadness.

Here's the hard truth: no consolation *we* offer can remove a person's grief. Only Christ himself can do that, because only He can forgive sins and raise the dead.

Let us consider what this truth means for us under the theme: **Jesus is the resurrection and the life.** 1) He comforts us in our grief. 2) He calls us from death to life.

Part One: He comforts us in our grief.

Our sermon text takes place approximately 6 days after Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. Instead of going to them immediately, He waited two days – understanding that God wanted to use this situation to reveal His Son's glory.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>17</sup>*When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.*

<sup>18</sup>*Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. <sup>19</sup>Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary was sitting in the house.*

Put yourself in Martha's place as she left to meet Jesus. What would you say to Him? You know His miracles. You know He has the power to heal. He is your friend. You sent word to Him about your brother's illness, but He didn't come. He let Lazarus die.

"Why would Jesus do this to us?" I would wonder. I could even picture my heart being angry at Jesus – wanting to cry: "Lord, why didn't you help him like you helped others?"

But Martha didn't do any of that. Instead,

<sup>21</sup>*Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."*

What a confession! Despite the unspoken pain in her heart and the temptation to question Jesus' power, love, and identity, Martha's faith clung to Jesus even more tightly. She believes He is the Christ. Instead of demanding answers, she entrusts her situation to His care.

<sup>23</sup>*Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."*

Jesus gives Martha the comfort He wants Christians to offer each other: the hope of the resurrection. The Bible is clear: the dead will rise - believers to everlasting life, and those who rejected the LORD to everlasting shame and contempt.<sup>ii</sup> We will see our believing loved ones again.

God wants us to comfort each other with this truth because Jesus not only promised it, He did what was necessary to accomplish it: suffered the punishment our sins had earned, died, and rose again to prove that all has been forgiven.

Telling a grieving Christian that their loved one will rise again is not a placebo comfort meant to trick them into feeling better. It is a real and powerful promise from the mouth of God himself. The only problem is that our grief often prevents us from feeling the full joy this truth offers.

*<sup>24</sup>Martha replied, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the Last Day."*

What gave Martha this confidence? Not the shaky sand of her brother being "a good person who deserves heaven." Scripture is clear: no one is good before God. No one deserves heaven.<sup>iii</sup> Faulty human goodness cannot stand before God's holiness

Rather, Martha's confidence rested on the solid rock of who Jesus is: the Son of God, who takes away the sins of the world.<sup>iv</sup>

Nevertheless, even with this promise, she feels a deep sense of loss. She loved her brother and misses him.

Sensing that,

*<sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies. <sup>26</sup>And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish.*

To fully appreciate Jesus' statement, we need to understand what the Bible means by "death" and "life."

- **Death** in Scripture means separation.
- **Life** means union

When a person's soul remains united with his body, he is physically alive. When his soul separates from his body, he dies.

More importantly, when a person is united with God, he is spiritually alive. When sin separates him from God, he is spiritually dead.

The Bible is clear: ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, all people are born into this world separated from God. We are all, by nature, spiritually dead.<sup>v</sup>

But Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He is God and man in one person. Only He can forgive our sins and reunite us to God.

How?

As true God and man in one person, Jesus was born into the world to do what no other human could do: live a perfect life of obedience to God's commands. Never once did He lust in His heart. Never once did he manipulate people to his own advantage. He always sought the good of others ahead of Himself. Jesus lived a completely righteous life for you and me so that, through faith in Him, God could credit Jesus' righteousness to us.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He also took all our sins upon Himself – all our greed, apathy, envy, addiction, and pride - and died in payment for them on the cross. God the Father separated His Son from His love and goodness while He hung on the cross, allowing Him to die in our place.

When His suffering for our sins was complete, the Father received His Son's spirit. And on the third day, He raised Jesus physically from the dead, proving beyond any shadow of a doubt that Jesus is our Resurrection and Life.

In view of that truth, Jesus said:

*Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies.*

Whoever repents and trusts in Jesus for salvation is spiritually alive. His soul is united with God, even if his body dies. And Jesus will raise his body to life again in the future.

*<sup>26</sup>And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish.*

Whoever is spiritually alive through faith in Jesus will never truly die - never be cast into hell, separated from God and His love forever. Nothing – no devil, demon, sin, suffering, or death - can cause that, as the apostle Paul confessed:

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>vi</sup>*

Jesus asked Martha:

*"Do you believe this?"*

This is a question we all must ponder. Do you truly believe Jesus is the Resurrection and Life? Do you believe He has forgiven all your sins to such a degree that you can be absolutely sure of your salvation? Do you believe that your believing loved ones continue to live with Him in heaven, because there is no death in Him – and that He will raise them physically on the Last Day? In short, do you take to heart everything Jesus says about Himself and apply it to yourself in faith?

Martha did.

*<sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord," she told him. "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

Martha saw her true and only comfort, and it was Christ himself! He is the true Son of God who came into this world to be her Resurrection and Life. He came to take away the record of sin that separated us from God, so that we might live with Him forever.

Let's return to our initial question: what comfort can I give a person who just lost a loved one to death?

The hard truth is that nothing we say or do can take away their grief. But we can point them to the One who can truly comfort them—Jesus. Only He can forgive sins. Only He can raise the dead – something that He not only promises but also showed by what happened next.

Part Two: He calls us from death to life.

After meeting with Mary, Jesus went with the sisters to Lazarus' grave.

*<sup>38</sup>Jesus was deeply moved again as he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup>"Take away the stone," he said.*

*Martha, the dead man's sister, told him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, because it has been four days."*

*<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*

Before we criticize Martha for wavering, remember that she didn't know exactly what Jesus was going to do. She believed Jesus would raise the dead - she just did not expect that it would happen today. In her grief, she slipped back into focusing on Lazarus being dead, instead of focusing on who Jesus is.

But once Jesus reminded her of His promise, she consented to everything He said.

*<sup>41</sup>So they took away the stone.*

*Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."*

*<sup>43</sup>After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"*

*<sup>44</sup>The man who had died came out with his feet and his hands bound with strips of linen and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus told them, "Loose him and let him go."*

When Jesus speaks, even the dead must obey His voice. What a miracle! It proved Jesus is the Son of God, who has power over death itself. And if Jesus can conquer death, He can rescue us from all our enemies.

*<sup>45</sup>Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what Jesus did believed in him.*

Why did Jesus allow Lazarus to die, instead of healing him right away? To reveal His power and glorify His Father. God used these events so that all who saw or heard of them might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing may have life in His name.<sup>vii</sup>

Let's go back to our original question one more time. What comfort can we offer those who mourn the loss of a loved one? We point them to Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life – as shown by His raising Lazarus from the grave.

But that invites the question: why doesn't Jesus raise our loved ones shortly after their death like He did Lazarus?

The Scriptures answer:

*The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.<sup>viii</sup>*

Yes, the souls of our departed Christian loved ones are at rest with the LORD. They are living with Him until the day comes when He will raise and glorify their bodies to live forever in the perfect paradise He will create on the Last Day.

So what comfort can we offer those who mourn the loss of a loved one?

We can sit with them, weep with them, and listen to them. But above all, let us point them to Jesus, who alone forgives sins, gives life to the spiritually dead, and calls bodies out of their graves.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you remember and mourn a departed loved one, don't think about them without thinking of Jesus. He is the Resurrection and the Life. Find joy in His work that forgave you, in His power that will raise you, and in His faithful love that comforts you as you live in Him. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. John 11:1-14

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Daniel 12:2, 1 Corinthians 15:51ff, 1 Thessalonians 4:16ff

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Psalm 18:2-3

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. John 1:29, John 3:16, Matthew 16:16

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Isaiah 59:2, Ephesians 2:1ff, Romans 3:10ff

<sup>vi</sup> Romans 8:38-39 EHV

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. John 20:31

<sup>viii</sup> Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV84