

Lent 5A, 2011

Text: John 11:17-27, 38-53

Title: Resurrection

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Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.
Jesus, the Son of God,
Jesus, the bread of life,
Jesus, our Savior,
Jesus, the door,
Jesus, the living water,
Jesus, the good shepherd,
Jesus, the light of the world,
Jesus, the way, and
Jesus, the resurrection.

Resurrection is what we need most in this land of death. As everything around us is dying, Jesus is the only one who can reverse this process, brought about by our sinfulness.

Death comes to us all, one way or another. For the people in Ezekiel's vision it was a violent death, death in battle. For Lazarus it was a long, lingering death, death after an illness.

Doubtless, you have experienced death. Sometimes it comes upon us quickly, all of a sudden. One day someone is fine, and the next they are gone. Sometimes it takes weeks, months, or years for the dying to run its course. And after a long time of suffering they finally lose strength and die.

No matter how it happens, we will all die. Sometimes we can hold death off for a time, but eventually we will all die.

Death is a result of sin. The wages of sin is death. Death is not a natural process. Death is your enemy. You were not made to die. But when sin entered the world through Adam, we all inherited both sin and mortality. Death will come to us all.

And when death comes we are all helpless.

You never feel as helpless as you do at a funeral. The person lying there in the casket is dead. And there's nothing you can do to change that fact. You can't do anything to help them. It's over. There's nothing you can do to bring them back to life.

We try to hide the effects of death. We use makeup and fancy clothes to make the person look as alive as possible. We surround our loved ones with flowers and pictures of what they looked like when they were alive. But there's no way to deny death, and no way for us to reverse its effects.

As you look upon the body for the last time, you feel helpless. And lots of thoughts rush through your head.

You want your loved one back. You want to have just one more moment, one more chance to see them and talk to them and tell them everything you wish you would have said. You would change places with them if you could. You would do anything to bring them back to life.

But you can't. You can't bring anyone back to life.

But Jesus can. Jesus can do what we can't do.

Nothing can stop Jesus, not even death itself. Where we are helpless and powerless, Jesus has power and authority even over death.

Jesus' words can bring people back to life. Jesus' words bear the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that brought Adam to life in the Garden, and that brought the army to life through Ezekiel's words.

Jesus' words called Lazarus back even from death and the grave.

What Jesus did for Lazarus was undeniable. Lazarus was obviously dead. Lazarus had been dead and was in the tomb for four days. His body had begun to decompose. He was obviously dead, and now He is obviously alive. Even people who had been enemies of Jesus believe in him because of this miracle. He's done what no one else can do.

Where everyone else was powerless and helpless, Jesus comes with power and authority. All creation belongs to Him, all creation listen to Him, and obeys His word.

Jesus' raising Lazarus points forward to His own resurrection. Jesus will die. Jesus will be wrapped in linen strips, with a cloth around His face. Jesus will be laid to rest in a tomb, with the stone rolled in front. And after a few days' rest, Jesus will rise from the dead, and He will be seen by His disciples.

Jesus' resurrection will be like Lazarus', but even better. His resurrection is not just for Himself, but for you, too.

Lazarus' resurrection was a good thing for his family and friends, but ultimately it doesn't do you any good. You were not baptized in the name of Lazarus. You do not eat and drink Lazarus' body and blood.

But you have been joined to Jesus, united to Him. You bear His name on your forehead, and you eat and drink His body and blood.

Because Jesus' rose, you will also rise.

Because of this resurrection, you now believe in Jesus. And through this faith we have this promise of resurrection. "I am the resurrection and life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

Jesus brought Lazarus back to life. He raised Lazarus, resurrected him.

And He will do the same for you.

One day you will die. It may happen all of a sudden. It may be a long time in coming. You may die surrounded by family and friends, or you may die all alone.

And however it happens, you will be helpless to do anything about it. No matter how hard you fight and struggle, no matter how many medications and treatments you undergo, unless the Lord returns first, you will die.

And your family and friends will feel helpless, too. They will wish that they had done more or said more, or tried to change things somehow, but it won't matter.

And one day, Jesus will call your name, just as He called Lazarus. The same body that your family and friends lay in the ground will arise, never to die again.

And it will be even better for you than it was for Lazarus. Lazarus was given back to his family for a time, but Lazarus died again and was buried.

But when the Lord raises you from the dead, you will live forever. You will be raised never to die again.

Jesus promises a real, physical resurrection. We confess our belief in "the resurrection of the body."

The promise of eternal life is not that you'll be a spirit floating around on a cloud for eternity. Jesus has something much better for you.

Jesus promises a real, physical resurrection. Just as Jesus raised Lazarus' physical body from the dead, He will raise you, too. You will get your body back, but better, healed, transformed, made to be like Jesus' resurrected body. You will no longer have to worry about death, you won't have to be afraid or feel helpless in the face of death again. Jesus will have conquered death forever.

So you need not feel helpless in the face of death. Jesus has conquered death, and you will share in His victory.

Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the resurrection and the life.