



SERMON OUTLINE *From I AM, chapter 6**

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE (JOHN 11:17-44)

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*Italicized text is quoted directly from chapter 6. Bulleted text represents additional talking points.

From magnificent cathedrals in bustling cities to humble homes in remote mountains and deserts, the greeting is the same:

“He is risen!”

“He is risen, indeed!”

With that exchange of greetings comes the acknowledgment that life has triumphed over death! Forever! In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, life wins!

The idea that life wins is an Easter certainty, but somehow we have tended to leave it to Easter to emphasize what should be the central affirmation of the Christian faith every day of the year. For many people, the test of that Easter greeting is greatest in the suffering and grief at the death of a loved one.

What does it really mean to say, “He is risen”? Is that more than an acknowledgment that Jesus has overcome the injustice and agony of his betrayal, cruel torture, and excruciating death on a Roman cross? Is it merely a seasonal greeting—one that holds no depth of truth to sustain us in the moments of searing loss when the worst possible news throws us to our knees?

Death is hard and harsh, even for those who believe in the promise of resurrection.

A. TRUST IS ASSAULTED BY LOSS (JOHN 11:17-22)

Jesus’s decision to delay his journey to Bethany confounds his dear friends and the concerned disciples. From the standpoint of the sisters, his timing is off—his arrival too late. From the standpoint of the disciples, his return to Judea is a recipe for disaster. The Jewish leaders have already been plotting his death, and it is certain that his being in proximity to Jerusalem will only give them greater opportunity to carry out their threats.

There is a tension in this narrative that is expressed by both the disciples and the sisters of Lazarus. If we misread this tension, we miss the point of this account.

- Jesus, after a delay, is going to Bethany over the protests of his disciples.

On his arrival in Bethany, Martha speaks words of disappointment (“if you had been here . . .” [v. 21]) . . .

- Thomas seems determined not to abandon Jesus, even in the face of death.
- Martha seems to believe in Jesus, even in the face of her grief and frustration that he did not come when he was summoned.

B. FAITH IS AWAKENED BY HOPE (JOHN 11:23–37)

In response to both of Martha’s statements, Jesus provides us with the central claim of the gospel of John and the major truth of the Christian faith. The theological center of this entire passage is contained in verses 25 and 26.

Ultimately, the faith that saves us is not our faith in the deeds and miracles of Jesus so much as our faith in the very person of Jesus.

Jesus is making bold claims. He is using their language. He is using their images and memories from their own prophetic writers. His words resonate with the people—especially the Pharisees—at profound levels.

The story of the raising of Lazarus has great power. We who read these words in the twenty-first century have the hindsight of two thousand years of history and tradition. But for Martha and Mary, this is a moment of convulsive grief and confusion.

But Jesus is not overwhelmed by this loss. He is not angry at their grief. He is not hesitant in the face of the Pharisees’ doubt. And his words begin to awaken a new level of hope in Martha’s grieving heart.

C. DEATH IS DEFEATED BY LIFE (JOHN 11:38–44)

Here is the moment of revelation that is the crux of all our hope. Here is the point toward which all the words of Jesus have been directed throughout his ministry. Here is the central reality on which our celebration of Easter stands to this very 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’” (vv. 25–26a).

But there is more—much more! In the words of Jesus to Martha (vv. 23–25), we hear an assurance that is more central to the Christian faith than the promise of the eventual resurrection of the dead. The claim of the Christian faith is that in Christ—risen, ascended, and reigning as sovereign Lord—we may have a measure of life, a dimension of being, in this world, at this time, in this life,

that is accessible through faith and based on the completed work of Jesus in his suffering death and resurrection.

This is the life made available to us when Jesus was raised from the dead on that first Easter morning. This is the life available to us as a gift of the Holy Spirit, poured out by the Father and the Son on the day of Pentecost. This is the life given in response to our faith in the promise of Jesus when he said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (10:10). This is what we mean when we say that the kingdom of God has come and is now at work in our world. This is the already/not yet kingdom of God where we have life in him, and even though we die, we live.

CONCLUSION

We must not forget the way in which Jesus shares the grief of these heartbroken sisters. His own heart is deeply moved over the agony of suffering, of disease, of death, and of sin.

His grief is a powerful reminder of the fact that our own loss and suffering are not ignored or overlooked by God. Jesus, the I AM, is touched deeply by the grief of his friends. He weeps!

But his grief does not disrupt the objective Jesus has in this momentous event. He makes his way to the grave of Lazarus, accompanied by the sisters and their grieving friends. He intends to state once again, and in the clearest possible terms and actions, that he is indeed who he says he is. After a fervent and instructive prayer, Jesus raises his voice in command and shouts, "Lazarus, come out!" (11:43b).

To the astonishment of everyone, Lazarus does just that. At the mere command of Jesus, he comes out of the tomb! I AM has spoken!

Death must release its grip on Lazarus because of who Jesus is.

On every Easter Sunday, when the Christian faith stops in wide-eyed wonder and marvels in remembrance of the stunning events of that day, it is important for us to once again be challenged by the words of Jesus to Martha: "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?" (vv. 25–26).

- The great gift of this story is not that Jesus **raises the dead**.
- The great gift of this story, and of all the gospel, is that **Jesus** raises the dead, that **Jesus** has come, that **Jesus** is **life**.
- Do you believe this?!