### “I Am the Resurrection” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Mar. 26, 2023

**John 11:1–44**

1 Now 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.” 4When 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. . .” 11He 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. . . 14Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15 For 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. . .”

19Many 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. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. . .” 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.”

28 She went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you. . .”

32When Mary came where Jesus was, she knelt at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33When Jesus saw her weeping . . . he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” . . .

39Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha said, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. . .” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

There’s a lot to work with in this gospel passage. Besides Jesus’ miraculous power, there is an essential truth statement, affirmed by one of his disciples, and there’s a good glimpse into Jesus’ human emotions and his relationships. Let’s examine the latter first. He is very good friends with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, who are siblings living in the village of Bethany. Their parents are never mentioned, so they may be deceased. These folks are disciples and friends of Jesus’ (11:3, 11).

When he heard of Lazarus’ death, and then, when he saw Mary weeping, he was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved” (11:33), and he wept (11:35). He was truly distressed by seeing the sisters weeping. But there was another reason besides compassion that led him to raise Lazarus.

This miracle is the one exception to the rule that Jesus followed, of not using miracles to get people to believe. But in this case, he waited two days before going to Bethany (11:6), and the reason was “For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe” (11:15). He actually performed this miracle to strengthen the faith of some whose faith was wavering.

We don’t know exactly who those of wavering faith were, whether they were some of the apostles, or some of his other followers, or even some who were not known as his followers but were wavering and considering. Yet, we have Jesus’ word that he delayed so that some people might come to believe. And he deliberately waited two extra days, to ensure that people would know that Lazarus really was dead. There were some people whom Jesus wished to persuade to believe by working this miracle. During his prayer, he says to God “I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me” (11:42).

There is only so much we can say about this because we don’t know whom he was trying to persuade, and we don’t know if he won them over. But it was not just Lazarus’ life that was at stake; somebody’s faith was also at stake, and Jesus was as concerned about the one as he was about the other. Jesus always cared as much about the one lost sheep as about the 99 who were not lost.

Also, the occasion gave him opportunity to speak to one disciple, Martha, about his special role. In the course of promising her that her brother would be raised, he makes the essential and timeless truth statement: “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). This is one of those non-negotiable claims. Either he is what he says he is, or he’s delusional and egotistical.

He goes on to say “everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do *you* believe this?” And she answers, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (11:26–27).

This makes her the first one to affirm a belief in Jesus’ resurrection power, even though he had already foretold his coming death and resurrection to his apostles, “but they did not understand what he was saying” (Mark 9:32), Mark says, and “they understood nothing about all these things” (Luke 18:34), Luke also says.

So Martha gets the opportunity to become the first disciple to believe in Jesus’ resurrection power. She didn’t resist Jesus’ message, the way the apostles resisted Jesus when he told them of his own coming death. They felt they *needed* to resist the suggestion of dying, even though he also told them that he would rise again on the third day. That part went right over their heads.

So, part of today’s lesson is that one ought to believe what Jesus tells you. This applies not only to what Jesus told Martha, which concerns his resurrection power over all people, but also to what Jesus told Mary, which concerns his raising of Lazarus in particular.

We should believe his promise that “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (11:25–26). We will all be raised, not in our original physical bodies, as Lazarus was, but in our coming spiritual bodies.

This faith is the solution for the sorrow that the sisters felt. If *we* have faith, we can overcome the sorrow of mourning and the fear of death. According to the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus came to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:15). He demonstrated his supremacy over death, both when he raised Lazarus and when he raised himself. Jesus sets us free from fear, fear of death. We can have a faith relationship with the one who has this Resurrection Power, and who has promised that he will raise us, too. “I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:40), he says.

Like Martha and Mary, we should believe Jesus when he says he will raise up our loved one who has died. In their case, Jesus chose to raise up their brother’s *physical* body, for all to see, because there were some people whose faith would be strengthened by seeing this wondrous act. In our case, he raises up our loved ones in the next life, in new bodies. It is the same spiritual power that Jesus uses in both cases. He has Creator power. He had it when he initiated life on this planet in the first place. He had it when he incarnated as a human being. And he has that power now, when he raises people after their death. It is done with love, in his role as God’s Son.

As this Gospel says in earlier chapters, “in him was life”; “For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (1:4; 5:26). Jesus is the life-giver. This is also what salvation means: the receiving of the gift of eternal life. Let us be believers, free from fear of death, safe in the ever-loving arms. Let us live our lives sharing this love from Jesus, in our own way bringing a bit of heaven into life here on earth.