

I Am - The Resurrection and the Life

John 11:17-27
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First Presbyterian Church
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What an incredible story the children just told as, we prepare to explore that, a man raised from the dead, set free from the grave! Do you believe that really happened? If so, why? How do we come to believe in something? We look for evidence, don't we? What we can touch, see, taste, smell and hear. Seeing is believing.

Take for instance, the time a lawyer was defending a man on trial for murder. There was strong evidence, but there was no corpse. The defense lawyer knew his client would probably be convicted, so he resorted to a trick:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury," he said. "I have a surprise for you all. Within one minute, the person presumed dead in this case, will walk through that door!" He looked toward the courtroom door. The jurors all looked on eagerly. A minute passed and nothing happened. Finally, the lawyer said, "Actually, I made up the previous statement. But you looked on with anticipation. So, there is reasonable doubt in this case as to whether anyone was killed, and I insist that you return a verdict of not guilty." The jury deliberated for only a few minutes before returning with their verdict: "Guilty." "But how?" asked the lawyer. "You must have had some doubt. I saw all of you stare at the door." The jury foreman replied: "Oh, we looked, but your client did not."

Yes, seeing is believing. But what is it to not see and still believe? None of us were there with Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead. Before reading about him in the Bible, none of us knew or even cared about Lazarus. So why is this story so important?

One reason is, we can all relate to it – losing someone or something you love. Lazarus was loved. Losing someone or something you love is never easy. It causes great sadness, like it did for Lazarus' family and friends. One of the most memorable and touching verses in the Bible is John 11:35, where it says, "Jesus wept."

Jesus loved Lazarus and yet, did he really cry because of his death? Somewhat, yes but He knew Lazarus would be raised from the grave. So really, Jesus cries because of the pain and suffering we endure at the loss of a loved one.

As our narrator, Set Brown said, "When Jesus ... saw (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled."

I have no doubt that Jesus grieved the loss of his friend Lazarus. But I think it grieved him even more to see others gripped by sadness, worry and disbelief. Jesus had been dealing with worry and disbelief all his life, even among his closest disciples.

For instance, the disciple played by Aiden, this morning, worries that if Jesus goes to Bethany in Judea, the Pharisees referred to as the Jews, will try to stone him again, to kill him. The disciple Thomas is so sure of this that when Jesus insists on going, Thomas says, "Let us also go, so that we may die with him."

Such disbelief. Poor Jesus. He's surrounded by people who are overcome by sadness, worry and disbelief. What's the Son of God to do? What do we do in the face of sadness, worry and disbelief?

For Christians – for those who put their trust in Jesus above all else – sadness, worry and disbelief never have the last word. There's always something we can do, someone we can reach out to, something that will bring us out of it, give us a new lease on life, put joy in our hearts, confidence in our outlook, and assurance in our core beliefs, our Christian faith.

Who or what is that for you? Who do you turn to for reassurance? For Martha – played by Alice today – she turned to Jesus, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Even so, I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

And so, Jesus, played by Nate, assures Martha, saying, "Your brother will rise again... I am the resurrection and the life... Everyone who believes in me," says Jesus, "will never die." But Lazarus is dead. So, Martha says, "yes, Lord, I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even he who comes into the world." Martha has strong faith, even if she's not quite sure what the Lord is going to do, how things will turn out. You see, sometimes it's not 'seeing is believing,' but rather it's believing so that you can see, truly see what's possible, with God's help.

Because Martha believes in the Lord, she's about to see just how powerful such faith can be. Jesus reaches the tomb where Lazarus has been laid and says, "remove the stone." Martha says, "...He has been dead four days." And Jesus says, "did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see,...see the glory of God?"

With Jesus, believing is seeing. First, we believe Jesus is active and powerful in our lives and then we begin to see evidence of it all around us.

Think of those things in life you had to believe to see—the recovery of a loved one who's deathly ill, and how you got through it by the power of prayer, the assurance of your faith. Or how about the beauty of a rainstorm? Not everyone sees it, but those who do are lifted above the ordinary to catch sight of the extraordinary. They see the rainbow that is to come.

How about the value of life itself? So many people fail to appreciate the value of life, even the life of the smallest creature among us. For instance, in my house, I follow a strict 'catch and release' policy when it comes to spiders.

Most people stomp on them. Why? Because our fear and worry get in the way of our belief, the belief that life is sacred and that God loves all creatures, great and small

What about our belief in justice? Does justice really exist in this world? Only if we believe it does.

How about unconditional love, or true love? These exist because we believe, we believe that love is the most powerful thing in life.

Same with truth. As uncertain as things are these days, we believe in truth, we believe there is such a thing as right and wrong. God help us on that day we no longer believe in truth. But then there's hope, right? Yes, there's hope, but only if you believe. Hope, love, truth and justice – they're so important to our lives, able to overcome any sadness, worry or disbelief. So remember. No matter what you're going through, when it comes to things like hope, love, truth, justice and the power of the Lord, believing is seeing. Amen

PASTORAL PRAYER

Minister: Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

**People: O God our rock and redeemer, hear our prayers
for your world this day.**

Minister: Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

People: Jesus wept.

Minister: We pray for those awash with tears, for those struggling with illness, depression and despair; for those who know hunger, war and oppression. Be their hope and comfort, gracious and loving God.

People: Jesus stood at the tomb, and wept.

Minister: We pray for those who know grief this day, who stand with loved ones on the threshold between life and death, who long for the good news of Easter to come, and come quickly.

People: Jesus stood at the tomb and commanded,

Minister: "Roll away the stone."

People: We pray for those of us who feel trapped, O

God, trapped in our own tombs of fear, doubt and apathy; tombs of arrogant pride, or dull self-loathing. Roll away the stone. Free us for loving service in your name.

Minister: Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

People: "Roll away the stone."

All: Amen.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.