

# Week Six: I AM the Resurrection and the Life

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

by: Misty Coyle

<sup>21-22</sup> Martha said, “Master, if you’d been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said, “Your brother will be raised up.”

<sup>24</sup> Martha replied, “I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time.”

<sup>25-26</sup> “You don’t have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?”

<sup>27</sup> “Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world.”

John 11: 21-22 The Message (MSG)

This may sound weird, but whenever I am about to read this story, the “Price Is Right” theme song starts playing in my head and the game show host is Genie, from Aladdin, with the voice of the late Robin Williams. “Aaaannnnndddd, what do we have for these believers who may not really believe unless they see so they can believe? Yes! One come-back-to-life brother!” I also picture in my head Jesus rolling his eyes at Martha and Mary, two extremely devout women, when he asked them if they believe and the women are still mad at him for not being there BEFORE Lazarus died.

Hello?!?!? Jesus has demonstrated his divine side numerous times and the people closest to him continue to ask for more proof. Now, at that moment, they were not asking for proof. In their eyes Jesus messed up. He didn’t get to Lazarus on time; so, now he cannot heal Lazarus because he is dead, dead, dead. But Jesus never gave up showing the reason for his being on earth. To each person who asked him about Lazarus, Jesus answered with: Do you believe? Each reply: Absolutely, buuuutttt.... By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus took much of the doubt away from the witnesses of the resurrection. Jesus also told everyone that this will happen again and to stay tuned and pay attention.

As we will see, the disciples, the believers, and the almost believers did not remember Jesus fore warning them. How many of us forget this as well? How many of us answer every day questions/tasks with “yes, but...” and we have the Gospel in front of us every day! It is hard to embrace a love so great, God already had plans of letting his son die when he was born on that Christmas day. When someone, close to us, dies; it is easy to reiterate they are with God now; however, in the back of our heads, we are Mary and Martha: If only God had healed the person instead of “letting” them die. I know they are with God, buuuutttt.... As Jesus said, I AM the Resurrection and Life, you have to believe me. There was no if, ands, or buts in that statement. For which I am thankful!

*I AM, Resurrection and Life, thank you for showing us your love is greater than anyone can possibly fathom. Help us to keep our hearts open, even though at times, we may feel pain. Remind us through the Holy Spirit, this pain is only temporary and there is more yet to come, and you have told us to believe. Amen, so be it!*

**Thursday, March 22, 2018**

by: Phil Hornbostel

And they brought forth the second brother for their sport. They tore off the skin of his scalp with the hair, and asked him, "Will you eat unlawful swine flesh rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them "NO!". Therefore, he in turn, underwent tortures as his first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from the present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."--II Maccabees 7: 7b-9.

We do not expect that we will ever face torture defending our faith in God, as the seven Maccabean brothers did. But through history, the people of God have faced crises in their lives, and many have suffered for their faith. How have the faithful faced suffering with serenity and peace? Because they know that no matter what happens in our lives, God remains in control. He does not promise that nothing evil will ever assail us. What He promises is that no matter how frightening our life, or our death, becomes, He is there, and He is in charge, and ultimately, He is the Resurrection and the Life, and that all of us who lose our lives for His sake, will find our lives, eternally. And Paul assures us, in Romans 8: 38-39, that nothing, not even death, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

*"Father, thank you for loving me, and for providing me the blessed assurance of your faithfulness through all eternity. Help me face the suffering and pain of life and death with serenity and the peace that passes all understanding. In Jesus' name, Amen".*

**Friday, March 23, 2018**

by: Juel Pierce

What I find at least as fascinating as the story of Jesus' raising Lazarus is what happens next.

***"Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death."***

We Christians are so naive sometimes! We act as though resurrection is good news. The strife is over, the battle is won! Hallelujah! But think of all the powers in this world that count on death to be permanent. The Jewish authorities thought the way to save their nation was to continue to live in fear of Rome. Everyone who ever fought a war counted on death—whoever kills the most enemies wins the war. Every government—including the Romans and up to our

own—counts on death being permanent when they practice capital punishment. Every mobster, from the Mafia to whatever gang fights to keep its turf, counts on the threat of death being permanent to achieve whatever they are fighting for. Because death causes fear. What will happen when my husband dies? What will happen if my children die? How will I be able to go on?

But if Jesus is the resurrection and the life, none of that—death and fear—can be counted on. The Enemy wants us to live in fear, because then we can easily be manipulated. But if Jesus has conquered death, if Jesus is the resurrection and the life, we who know and trust in Jesus can have faith that death is not the end.

I remember a story I heard in a sermon once, of a village in Denmark, or Norway, where the Nazis had taken power. Every day the villagers, in a show of resistance, gathered at the church to sing a hymn of faith, and then went to their homes to continue their lives. Finally, the Nazi commander got tired of it. He was there at the church one day when the villagers gathered. He announced that no one could sing—if anyone sang, the babies in the village would be murdered in front of them. No one said a word, much less sang a word. Until a trembling voice began the song—it was a young mother, holding her baby in her arms.

That we trust in Jesus, the resurrection and the life, does not mean that we do not ever feel afraid. What it does mean is that when death surrounds us, when fear is palpable, faith in Jesus gives us the courage to walk in faith, to speak our faith, to sing, to dance, because Jesus, not death or evil or fear, is Lord.

*Jesus, help us to trust in you in times when resurrection brings fear to the powers around us. Help us to rejoice, even when joy is hard. AMEN.*

**Saturday, March 24, 2018**

by: Jeff Langdon

“I AM the Resurrection and the Life” - from the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11-17-27

This is the final I AM statement that we are looking at during the season of Lent. During this account by John, Jesus is told that his good friend Lazarus is dying while Jesus was teaching on the other side of the Jordan river. When Jesus returned to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had been dead for 4 days.

As I was reading about this account I read in a reference that the 4 day period was significant because the popular Jewish thought at the time was that a soul could periodically visit its body for a few days after death. It seems that Jesus delayed his return to Bethany until there would be no hope for, or explanation of a resurrection other than through the power or intervention by God.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, He told Martha that Lazarus would live again. Martha may not have understood what Jesus was saying because she acknowledged and agreed with Jesus that there would be a future resurrection... but Jesus was not talking about a future resurrection... Jesus was talking about himself and the here and now. Jesus said “I am the resurrection and the life”, bringing the focus or attention on himself, not a future event. Jesus

was claiming to be the very source and power of resurrection... Jesus was claiming that He was the one who grants and guarantees the life of those who follow him, and he demonstrated the truthfulness of His claim by calling Lazarus from the grave.

There is another part to the story... and just as important for our lives in the here and now. Lazarus was beyond saving... 4 days. Mary and Martha were grieving. They were waiting for Jesus to come, Jesus had delayed, and Lazarus had died. Something bad had happened. **They had no hope...despite their faith.** But note that even in her grief, when asked if she believes, Martha responded with "Yes, Lord". Jesus had challenged Martha's faith and she responds in faith.

When life is hard, challenges are raised up, and things may seem bleak. We wonder what has happened. Fear abounds. But often during those very times, our faith is strengthened. How many times during trials do we finally give up and lean on God and remember that we are not in control and that it is God who is in control.

It is through faith and not fear that Martha must trust Jesus and push through the grief she is experiencing to know that whoever follows Jesus and believes in Jesus will live. It is with faith and not fear that we too must push through grief to the realization that faith and trust in Jesus brings life.

Without fear we can entrust our lives and our final destiny into the outstretched hands of Jesus, because Jesus is the only one who grants us life. Through the waters of Baptism we are spiritually claimed and resurrected from death... and we have been given a promise that God will raise our lifeless bodies anew or give us new bodies and on the final day be joined with the Saints in God's presence forever.

*Dear God, The Great I AM...I often forget that I am not in charge. Help me remember that you are the one in charge and that your desire for me is to trust in you. Lord, increase my faith and trust in you. Take away fear and doubt. Help me remember that my salvation is not found in the things I do, but in my faith in you. Thank you for being my God. Help me reflect your love in all I do. AMEN*

**Sunday, March 25, 2018**

by: Pastor Roger Lenander

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Mark 8:31–33 (NRSV)

The foolishness of my youth is that I thought I knew what life was all about. Fame and fortune. Those became the goals I thought was where true happiness in life was found. What was the best job I could get that made the most money that impressed the girls and made others envious of my success? I never considered self-sacrifice an ingredient to gain life. And then Jesus encountered me. I heard that fame and fortune for himself was not what he sought in life.

Jesus said, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

This week we move towards God's victory in the Risen Jesus Christ. But first there comes suffering and death. Jesus taking on the suffering for our sin, the death that is our judgement before God. We may protest that certainly there is a better way. Certainly, conquering love can be won without the agony and humility of Jesus. It cannot. So, we again join with Christians from all places in this world and follow Jesus to the table of the Lamb of God, to the Cross of the Son of God, to the tomb where we hear God's surprise. Jesus is not here. He is Risen. And because he lives so shall we live in and through him forever. Amen.

*Jesus, you are our Servant King who creates us a new way of living, now and forever. Amen.*

**Monday, March 26, 2018**

**by: Brenda Bass**

I usually sing these words – in my mind's eye I see an 8<sup>th</sup> grade girl at her confirmation questioning standing alone – with my sister playing the guitar behind me. This song was my statement of faith that each of us had to prepare on the night of our questioning before the Church Council. I don't remember the words I spoke – but the song lives on and on and on:

"I am the resurrection and the life,  
You who believe in me will never die.  
I am the resurrection and the life,  
You who believe in me will live a new life!"

Jesus is speaking to Martha, his friend, and the sister of Lazarus, who had just died. Jesus grieves for his friend but reminds Martha that death is not the end for those who believe in God.

Without the hope of new life, the world around us seems bleak and overwhelming. Without hope, there is no reason for living.

Jesus promises us new life – both here and in the hereafter! Every day is a new day – with new life given as the sun rises each morning! There will be death in our lives: relationships lost, abilities lost, opportunities lost – but with the words Jesus spoke to Martha we are called to remember the life that is ours through Jesus.

It is so appropriate that we celebrate Easter in the spring of the year! We have been anticipating the end of the long winter, the days of darkness and cold giving way to sunshine and warmth. And all around us signs of new life: greenery springing forth from trees and grass; birds singing and welcoming the longer days of light; new life literally coming up out of the ground as flowers push through the dirt!

*Praise the Lord for new life! Praise the Lord for new life here and in the hereafter! Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 27, 2018**

by: Jim Pierce

Jesus said [to Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (*John 11: 25–26*)

“I AM the resurrection and the life.” To help us begin to wrap our minds around what these words mean, let me point you ahead to two things Jesus says in John 12:

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (*John 12: 24*)

“I, when I am lifted up from the earth [on the cross], will draw all people to myself.” (*John 12: 32*)

Jesus told Martha that he was/is the resurrection and the life as part of a pastoral conversation following the death of her brother Lazarus who had already been in the grave two days. That context logically points us to our own deaths, whenever those come, promising that for us believers there is a resurrection—life beyond death. Death does not have the final word. Instead, Jesus is God’s final word.

How can this be? That’s where the verses from John 12 help us. Jesus tells the crowd that the time for the judgment of the world and its ruler has come. The time has come for God to be glorified as the world is drawn to God. This happens through Jesus, the grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies in order to bear much fruit. This happens through Jesus, lifted up on the cross where his dying is the judgement of the world and its ruler.

In God’s mysterious way Jesus, lifted up on the cross, proclaims God’s judgement. The world and its ruler don’t win. In fact, the world and its ruler are drawn to the cross like iron filings to a magnet. The eyes of all are drawn to the cross, and from there to the tomb of Jesus, and from there to the empty tomb proclamation, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” “I AM resurrection, I am life!”

The promise Jesus makes in saying, “I AM the resurrection and the life,” is a promise he can make only because he has passed from life into death and into life again, becoming for us the way. Because Jesus is our way through death to life, we are free to not hold life too tightly ourselves. Again, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” We are grains of wheat who do not have to hold on so tightly to life that we do nothing. We can let go, feel our hard shells crack open as Jesus draws us from death into life not only on some future day but now, today, so that we might bear fruit that leads others to the one who is their resurrection and life as well.

*Jesus, resurrection and life, thank you for giving this gift to me. Use me to announce this gift to others that they, too might believe and live. Amen*