

“Giving Up Our Lives” - John 11:17-44 – Rev. Jeff Childs

The story of Lazarus and his sisters hits home with us because there are a couple dramatic twists or turns in the story. The grief experienced by Mary and Martha, the disciples and friends including Jesus at the death of Lazarus, we feel or have felt. That feeling is succinctly expressed in one of my childhood favorite Bible verses which is found here in this story, *“Jesus wept.”* (John 11.35) We know grief and pain and loss. And we know our God weeps with us.

The twist in the story shows us a glimpse of Easter and the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. For here, at Jesus’ call, Lazarus walks out of the darkened tomb and into the light, out of death and into life. From the very deepest emotion of grief and loss comes the joy and exhilaration of life. Do you read the Upper Room? Mine comes to me daily in an email on my computer. A couple years ago I remember a meditation that offers an illustration for us. Gary “Buzz” Meader from Missouri shared the story of his infant daughter Hope’s grave condition when she was born with a digestive tract that was not functioning which caused the hospital doctors to fear the worst. Arriving back at the hospital the next morning fearing to hear of his daughter’s passing in the night, he found instead an elated pediatrician remarking that it was a medical miracle, “Hope is alive!” Can you imagine Mary and Martha from the depths of their grief, seeing that their brother is alive? It’s a miracle! Life is a miracle. It’s a God thing.

The old advice is good advice: Don’t put a period where God puts a comma. We are used to thinking of life in terms of fixed beginnings and ends. But, this story of Jesus calls us to throw away our old limitations and embrace God’s larger vision of eternal life that begins here and now, not after this earthly life is over. There are some around us who may think the end is the end. For them there is no faith, no hope and there is no eternal life. When it’s over it’s over for them. On occasions I have been called to do funerals for some of them and the grief is dramatically compounded and nearly inconsolable without any sense of a hope of life beyond death. With faith we have what Charlie Brown used to say, “good grief.” Jesus said it this way, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* (Matthew 5.4)

For us the Bible holds stories of God who creates life from death, nothingness, and hopelessness. In Ezekiel 37:1-14 there is a marvelous story of God telling the prophet to call dry bones back to life. As the story unfolds, we can almost see and hear the bones rattling as they come back together, and muscles and skin renewed. Finally, the prophet calls upon the Spirit of Life to come back into what had been dried up lifeless beings. Sometimes we feel lifeless, don’t we? We feel like we are just going through the motions - just getting through the day or the week. Here is the subtext for this morning. It is not just about life but choosing how to live that life. *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them.”* (Matthew 16.24-25) Jesus was calling people to a new life, he called disciples to come and follow, to leave their old lives and their old ways to a new life in him. He would use these words with one who felt he needed to turn back, *But Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.’* (Matthew 8.22) Today, you choose what you want to be, like the old west wanted posters used to say – “Dead or Alive.”

Claim your new life in Christ today! What if we were to give up these shadows of existence and be resurrected - to really live for Jesus? The question today is, “Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired?” We come to a point where we say this isn’t working and it is time to make a change. Or maybe we have a heart attack or other life changing event that causes us to “wake up and smell the roses.” Lazarus got a do over. He got a fresh start to live for Jesus. The Apostle Paul did too. He would write about it this way: *So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part*

of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! (2 Corinthians 5.17) In Jesus we have died to our old way of living and have new life. We no longer live for ourselves, we live for Christ. We give up our old lives, in order to live new lives for Christ. What are you waiting for? Hear his invitation calling you to come out of your tomb, out of your shell, today come to the table, share his body and blood and fully live.

For me the powerful words of Jesus in this passage are the words Jesus says to Martha in verse 25, *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*. Martha responds that she believes it. How about you? And then, hear again the final words of Jesus in this story as he says to the crowd after Lazarus comes walking out of the tomb in verse 44, *Unbind him and set him free*. Hear those words being spoken to us today. What might we do to unbind those around us who are bound up in their old way of living? What is binding you up preventing you from fully following Jesus? Let it go. Be free. Alleluia and Amen.

Most days are you more half dead or fully alive?

Who around you is bound up in their old way of living? Can you help them get free?

What is binding you up preventing you from fully following Jesus?

Do you believe Jesus is the "resurrection and the life?"

How has that changed your life?

Jesus Spoke to Lazarus (John 11)

Jeffrey B. Childs 3/28/25

Jesus spoke to Lazarus,
With a commanding shout,
And at the call of Jesus,
Lazarus came out.

Likewise, we have been bound,
And by old ways tied up,
Forgiveness we have found,
Through Christ's bread and cup.

By Christ's mercy we're set free,
No longer living old ways,
For in Christ, we now can be,
Alive for Christ always.