

Resurrection Life!
Sermon for the 5th Sunday in Lent
March 29, 2020

Text: John 11:1-53 (which I encourage you to read first!)

What really matters in life? Of all the things that we consider to be so very important to us, of all that you hold so dear, what really matters? Paul Azinger was a professional golfer who won 12 tournaments on the PGA—the Professional Golfers’ Association tour. Today he is a broadcast analyst for golf tournaments. In 1993, Azinger was in his golfing prime. He was 33 years old and had just won the prestigious PGA tournament. Shortly after winning that event Azinger was diagnosed with cancer. Here’s what he said, **“Suddenly, everything changed! Suddenly, I realized that I could die this year and it could all be over!** He said he then had another thought, **“Is this all there is? And what if I do live on? What does it matter? I’m going to die eventually, anyway.** He continued, **“A genuine feeling of fear came over me that not only could I die from cancer this year, but even worse, anyway I could die from anything someday else and suddenly everything I had accomplished in golf became meaningless to me. All I wanted to do was live!**

Azinger is a Christian. One of Azinger’s friends was leading a Bible study Azinger attended and told him, **“Zinger, we are not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We are people living in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living.”** [Illustration from a sermon preached by Dr. Greg Seltz] That’s not bad; it’s pretty good. Our text, however, has an even better word! Yes, we are living in the land of the dying, but this account from John 11 tells us that through faith the Resurrected One—Jesus Himself—is living in us with Resurrection Life even now as we live in this world!

We live in a time, we live in a world, in a country, in lives that are filled with thoughts, sometimes preoccupied with thoughts of a deadly virus. Some of that is very good. We need to seriously practice the precautions set before us, even placed upon us, to limit exposure to this virus. We are in a time of sacrifice, self-sacrifice in concern for ourselves and, if you are not so concerned about yourself, then for others. Public sources are saying that to follow precautions is good citizenship, even patriotism. I say it is simply Christianity—love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. But, truly, we live in a time where our concern is driven by a fear of infection and, even more, a fear of death.

The truth is that we are all dying and we are all constantly subject to death. I’m not just talking about being affected by someone else’s death. You and I, every one of us could die any day. Death is a consequence of sin. We are all sinners who daily disobey and dishonor God. It’s not just what we do that we shouldn’t; there are countless ways we fail God and others every day by not doing what we should. and in so doing have brought upon ourselves the curse of death. Need proof? How many of your ancestors have escaped death? Not a one! You will not either. Neither will I.

But there was One! The One man to encounter death and escape is Jesus. God’s own Son became a man, Jesus was born for this very purpose to break the power of sin and death for us. True God and True Man Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself and received the just punishment for the sin of all as He died upon the cross. On the third day He rose from the dead. Oh, Jesus did not just escape death in the sense that He slipped away from death. Jesus not only escaped death; Jesus destroyed death by His resurrection on the third day. God’s Word tells us, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”** (Hebrews 2:12).

This freedom from the fear of death is yours through faith in Jesus our Savior. In our Gospel account today Jesus said to Martha, whose brother Lazarus had died, Jesus said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

Martha gives the response of faith which the Holy Spirit had worked in her. She said, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” Now, I know people sometimes roll their eyes, at least inwardly, when we pastors make a special point of the grammar of the original language, but there is one here that is most important. The action word Martha uses when she makes this statement of faith actually means “Yes, Lord, I have believed, I am believing, and I will continue to believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God!” Isn’t that great! Martha is saying, “Not even death can separate me from you, Jesus!”

Jesus wants you to have this same assurance. Earlier John has told us “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” Jesus has loved you in this way. He wants you to be assured that He has broken the power of death for you as He died for the forgiveness of your sins. Trusting in Jesus you have this sure and living hope of the resurrection from the dead. Even now, by faith in Jesus you have this life. Jesus said “everyone **who lives** and believes in Me shall never die.” He is talking here of spiritual life, because, unless Jesus returns soon, you and I will physically die. But Jesus says those who believe in Him shall never die. That expression literally means it’s impossible for you and me as believers to die that death that is the eternal separation from God in hell. We don’t need to be afraid of that. Jesus and His Resurrection are our assurance that we will be raised to the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

Martha wants Mary, her sister to have the same comfort of the presence of Jesus. Martha went to get Mary. Mary rose quickly when she heard Jesus had come. She longed for the consolation Jesus could give. We do too, that’s why we keep coming back to hear Jesus’ word.

“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled.” We are also told that Jesus wept. That Jesus was deeply moved and wept show the compassion Jesus has for us, that His heart goes out to us who mourn. When you mourn, know this compassion of Jesus to comfort you. Jesus had once promised His believers, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

But the text also tells us Jesus was greatly troubled. The same word is used of Jesus when He came to Lazarus’ tomb. This word translated “troubled” can carry the meaning of anger. In fact one translation has “He was angry” and another “He was deeply angry.” Taken in this sense it reveals Jesus’ irritation, not only that death had taken His friend, but also that the mourners wept as those without hope (note from Lutheran Study Bible). Now Jesus did not voice a rebuke, but He was deeply moved in His spirit.

Jesus then told them to take away the stone. Martha objected, “He has been dead four days.” In other words, Lord, this is impossible! Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” And then Jesus prayed, “Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that You sent Me.” And then He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” And at the command of the Lord of life the dead man had only one option—Lazarus came to life and he came out!

Child of God, you who have so many anxieties and fears, know this, Jesus is calling you and me to trust Him in all things, through all things, and for all things. Jesus is calling us to trust His Word, all of His promises recorded for us in the Bible. Jesus is calling us to trust Him in the threatening dangers of our daily lives, now and always. Jesus is calling us to trust Him even as we acknowledge and face the reality that any day may be our last. Jesus is calling you to trust Him, “the Resurrection and the Life.” Trust in Him who said, “Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” Do you believe this? By the life-giving power of the One who has called us from the death of sin to a

new and death-conquering life, we say, “Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” I have believed, I am believing, and I will continue to believe in You dear Savior, for not even death can separate me from God’s love which is mine through You.

One day Jesus is coming back. The One who broke the power of sin and death for you is coming back. Here how God’s Word describes that great day: “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Child of God, you live believing in Jesus your Savior. Live confidently. Live securely. Live peacefully. Live compassionately. Live encouraging others with Jesus’ words. Live now and forever in the name of Jesus. Amen.