

“I Am the Resurrection and the Life” | John 11:1-44

The Rev. Dr. John Frederick | The Falls Church Anglican

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(Discussion questions on page 7)

Introduction and Setting the Stage

“I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Today’s passage continues our study of the “I am” sayings of Jesus in John’s Gospel. Each saying has revealed something new about Jesus’s identity as the fully-human and fully divine Son of God.

Today’s passage is somewhat unique among the “I am” sayings. The others feel almost like parables, or extended metaphors:

- “I am the bread”,
- “I am the door”,
- “the Good Shepherd”
- and “the vine”.

Here in John 11, Jesus delivers this trademark verse within the context of a forty-four-verse narrative, a story about a friend, Lazarus, who died and was raised back to life by Jesus.

We’ll get started by setting the stage, situating you in the background of the story through looking briefly at verses 1-16.

For our first main point, we’ll look first at verses 17-27, where Jesus says, “I am and the resurrection and the life.” And we’ll discover how Jesus invites us into a **resurrection hope**, based not primarily on a theological **proposition**, or even a **promise**, but **in a person**, the crucified and resurrected Lord.

Then, we’ll move on to our second point by exploring verses 28-44. There we’ll find that resurrection hope leads not only to **resurrection rest** but to **resurrection action**, living out the power of the resurrection as Christ’s body in the midst of a broken world.

Resurrection hope in a person not a proposition. And the call to resurrection action. But before we get there, let’s begin by setting the stage.

Setting the stage (John 11:1-16)

a. vv. 1-4

Let’s read chapter 11, verses 1-4 to start on page 897. You’ll probably want to keep your Bible open, if you have one, because we’ll be constantly reading small sections of the passage to make sure it doesn’t feel like we’re reading the Cliffnotes but really aware of the nuances of the story.

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Here in verse 1, we learn that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha had become ill. What you might miss at first glance is that **verse 2 is a flash-forward**.

- The story of Mary anointing Jesus with burial ointment does not actually come until the next chapter, in John 12:1-8.
- Among early Christians in John’s community, this would have been a widely known event.
- John presents it here to foreshadow Jesus’s own death

This is **not a “sickness unto death”** as the older translations rendered it. In other words, the illness will not result in eternal spiritual death even if it results in temporary physical death.

b. vv. 5-10

Continuing to set the stage, look at verses 5-8,

⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?”

It is striking to hear that “Jesus loved Lazarus” and his whole family. But when he hears Lazarus is sick, he decides to **remain in the place where he was for two additional days**.

- You’d have expected him to go to Bethany straightaway!

We learn that his delay is not, however, out of negligence or a lack of love. Jesus indicates in verse 4 that this entire episode will result in “the glory of God” by causing his disciples and those on the scene to believe.

In verses 7-10, Jesus exhorts his disciples “Let us go to Judea again.” This is a dangerous area in which people were eager to kill him. The town of Bethany is less than two miles from Jerusalem. In returning to the region, Jesus is entering the final stage of his ministry. His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem where he will be crucified occurs in the very next chapter.

In verses 11-16, we learn that Lazarus has already died, and in verse 15 Jesus again exhorts his disciples, “**Let us go to him!**”

[Transition]: With this background in mind, we can now turn to our first major point, found in verses 17-27. Here we’ll learn that **resurrection is not merely an abstract theological proposition; it is a person—Jesus Christ**.

I. Resurrection is not merely an abstract proposition; it is a person (John 11:17-27)

Verses 17-27 is the section we heard read this morning. I want to begin by focusing on verses 21-23:

- In verse 21, Martha exclaims, “Lord, if **you** had been here my brother would not have died.”
 - Notice, the personal emphasis on Jesus.: if “**you**” had been here.
 - Jesus was widely known as not only a riveting rabbinic teacher, but also as a healer and miracle worker
 - Martha and those with her would have known of earlier instances in which Jesus rose a boy and a girl from the dead in Luke chapters 7 and 8.
 - Those healings happen **way earlier** in Jesus’s ministry than this episode in John 11

Jesus answers her with an enigmatic saying,

“Your brother will rise again.”

Martha interprets this within the standard Jewish doctrine of the day.

“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Martha knows her doctrine. She knows the commonly held Jewish belief about a general resurrection on the last day. Nevertheless, her grief is not satiated merely by the recitation of correct theology. She needs more than a catechism; she needs Christ. She needs more than a proposition; she needs *Jesus*.

In verse 25, Jesus answers her with today’s “I am” statement,

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in **me**, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and **believes in me** shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Martha responds, at once shifting from her standard doctrinal understanding to a focus on the person of Jesus rather than generic theology about the future:

“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Jesus asks, “do you believe I am the resurrection and the life?” Martha responds “yes” but she attributes two other titles to Jesus. **Not** “the resurrection and the life” **but** “the Christ and the Son of God.” Her understanding is still in process, as was everyone’s at the time. No one truly knew the full truth of who Jesus was.

- During this time in history, the title “the Christ” simply meant “anointed one.” It was the Greek translation of Messiah.

- “The son of God” was another title found in Old Testament passages like **2 Samuel 7:14** and **Psalms 2** that referred to a future leader in the line of David. A person who would have a special relationship with God, and who would lead God’s people into a new season of blessing.

At this time, neither “the Christ” nor “son of God” were equivalent with “God incarnate” or “divine.” That development came later, as the church read the Bible and saw how it all fit together.

Martha is on the right track. She exercised incredible faith in Jesus as teacher, Messiah, and the Son of God. But as one commentator put it,

She hadn’t yet been shown the connection between her abstract belief in the resurrection and a personal faith in Jesus.

In other words, she hasn’t been shown that *Jesus himself* is the resurrection, and *Jesus himself* is the life. And, really, in moments like these, moments of grief and pain, what we really need for comfort, rest, and hope is not a proposition; but a person; not an idea; but the actual incarnate presence of the crucified and resurrected Lord.

[Application]

This past week I read an article about a little 5-year old girl from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Her name was Suza Kenyaba. She was described in ways that reminded me of my daughter, and your daughters. Pigtailed, crazy about pretty dresses. And like many of our daughters, she needed medication. Swept with a vicious fever, her parents brought her to a clinic sweating and shivering.

The medication that would save her life was a mere seven miles from the clinic in a warehouse. But because of complications from disruptions to foreign aid, the medicine never got to her. The paragraph in the article concludes abruptly, “Less than a week after her symptoms began, Suza was dead.”

I wept when I read that story. Compassion and grief radiated viscerally from my inmost being in solidarity with her father and deep sadness for her family. I felt the sting of how inconsolable I would be if it were my own child, a pain and grief so pervasive and horribly powerful that I honestly feel would have no way of ever letting it go. Like I would, humanly speaking, never recover from it. I also felt helpless.

In that moment, “I know she will be raised on the last day” is good theology; it is. But my in that moment it would not be enough for me to hold tightly to a doctrine; what I’d really need is to hold onto a person—Jesus. Jesus, who not only can ‘relate’ to me, but was resurrected for me; who not only died for me, but who also lives for me, and I in him. The bread. The vine. The Good shepherd. The Resurrection and the life.

[Transition]: We stand and weep at the bedside of Suza like Jesus did at the tomb of Lazarus and the personal presence of the resurrected Lord will give hope and rest to our weak and weary souls. But it doesn’t end with resurrection rest. For Christ’s body, his people, the church indwelt

by the Holy Spirit, **resurrection hope** and **resurrection rest** must always lead us on to **resurrection action**.

II. Resurrection Action (John 11:28-44)

Let's pick up at verse 32,

³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ 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. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept.

Jesus takes in the destruction and devastation of death, and Jesus doesn't shrug his shoulders like an apathetic Stoic; Jesus weeps. He feels "moved" and "greatly troubled," the passage says, words which indicate **outage** and **indignation**. Jesus is indignant at death, not indifferent to it.

Skip down a bit to verse 38 and following,

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me." ⁴² 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." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.

The section ends with a call to active participation in the process of liberation:

^{44b} Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

These verses present a discernible pattern: weeping, outrage, and then action.

It's a pattern that we can follow when practicing resurrection, as Christ's hands, and feet, and mouth—as Christ's body in a world inundated with death and broken things in need of his resurrecting power and presence. The other side of resurrection rest is resurrection activism.

- **Not weeping, outrage, and walking away.**
- **Not weeping, anger, and the rapture of religious escapism.**
- **No: weeping, indignation, and resurrection action.** Moving the stone. Praying for God's power. And calling the dead things back to life by the mighty power of Jesus.

Friends: we are not called to get saved, grab **the salvation security blanket of the resurrection**, and then climb back in the tomb.

Jesus doesn't sing us a lullaby at the tomb to put us to sleep like a salvation sedative; he shouts a rally cry: "Come out, arise" "unbind them, let them go!"

And whether it is practicing resurrection at a global level, through partners like World Vision or the Anglican Relief and Development fund. Or resurrecting personal relationships and practicing resurrection in our schools, cities, and neighborhoods.

Resurrection hope for the future prompts us to be apply Christ's resurrection power in the present. Jesus calls to participate: "Unbind them and let them go." He bids us as his Body to follow his pattern—weeping, outrage, and action—raising the dead things in this world, healing the broken things in this world, and practicing resurrection as resurrection activists so that his will might be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Conclusion

The truth is, if we have resurrection action without resurrection rest, we will lose hope when our energy runs out, when our luck runs out, when our time runs out. But if we only have resurrection rest; we will consume religious comfort like a drug that puts us to sleep while the broken world cries out around us to be raised up and healed.

In our times of deepest grief and need, we don't merely need a resurrection doctrine; we need a resurrected relationship with a resurrected person—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And this resurrected Lord calls us to serve the weak and needy as his Body in the world. It is a great hope and a great mission. A great comfort and an even greater calling.

It is fitting then, to give the last word to Jesus today from Matthew 25, as we hold firm to him as our resurrection and life, and as we abide in him for resurrection rest and resurrection action:

³⁴ The King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ **For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'**

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' **40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'**

Discussion Questions

- (1) How does the fact that Jesus himself is the resurrection and the life, in his very person lend to a spiritual resilience and longevity that is more significant than merely affirming a proposition about the idea of resurrection?
- (2) What are some ways that you can practice resurrection in the global, local, and familial levels? How can these be differentiated from common grace acts of charity, and how can they be enhanced by the pattern of weeping, indignation, and action evidenced by Jesus?
- (3) How do the patterns of **weeping, outrage, and walking away**, and **weeping, outrage, and rapture** (i.e. religious escapism and withdrawal) **differ from Jesus's pattern of weeping, outrage, and resurrection action.**
- (4) In Matthew 25:34ff, Jesus tells us that when we give of ourselves to the least in the world, it is as if we are doing it to him. How does the model of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians and the model of evangelical action exhibited in Mt. 25, provide a framework for resurrection action that refuses the world in its present brokenness calls into being its future blessedness?
- (5) One of David Bebbington's Four Points of Evangelicalism is "activism." This word can have many meanings, but Bebbington points to the rich history of social action, evangelism, and missions that stems from born-again persons and denominations. How is this represented in contemporary conservative evangelicalism? How can we ensure integration of resurrection hope with resurrection action so that sound doctrine is never separated from active engagement?