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Peace, Sun Prairie  
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Lent 5

John 11:17-27, 38-45

## CHRIST IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

The Bible, the Christian faith, Peace Lutheran Church, Sunday worship –these things are not about philosophies or morality or ideals, not about a manufactured system of beliefs or virtues or values or traditions or styles. It’s all about a person. Meet Christ.

On the night before His death, Jesus told His disciples in the upper room that soon He would be going to His Father. Philip requested, *Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.* Jesus replied, *Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*

And so it was for Martha. She must have been listening carefully to what Jesus had been teaching all along. Jesus said to her, *Your brother will rise again.* Her remarkable response of faith was, *I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.* Yet Jesus wanted to bring her spiritual sight into focus even more. He wanted to enlighten her as to who it was standing right in front of her –that the resurrection from the dead was not merely some far off happening, that the resurrection is not merely a future act of God. No, the resurrection was standing right in front of her. Christ Himself is the Resurrection. Before her very eyes stood the One who created us, the One in whom we live and move and have our being, the very Author of life. He united Himself to the dying human race by becoming one of us and now death can only melt away before Him. From this God-man life abounds for us who are made of flesh and bones. So today let’s focus on this reality that *Christ is, Christ is the Resurrection and the Life.*

Mary and Martha had sent Jesus a messenger to tell Him that Lazarus was deathly ill. Jesus responded, *This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.* Wow, that sounded pretty good! It’s likely that the messenger heard Jesus say this – this sickness will not end in death! He would have brought word back to Mary and Martha. Yet Jesus delayed and Lazarus did die.

That explains Martha’s puzzled reaction: *On his arrival, Jesus found Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”* This is so human. Aren’t you Martha? You can sense her confusion and her trust in Jesus all at the same time. “I don’t understand what’s going on here, but Jesus is good. Jesus can only be good.” Jesus promised that Lazarus’ sickness would not

end in death. That's certain. But did He mean now, or later on? Did Jesus intend to make good on His promise in some way she hadn't thought of? Isn't this so often our own experience? We know that God in His clear, written Word may have promised us a certain thing. But it doesn't appear to be happening the way we thought.

So Jesus begins to clarify for Martha. And as the fog of her confusion dissipates, what answer emerges? Jesus. Just Jesus. Listen again to how Jesus addresses her need: *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

Again, her confession of faith is breathtaking. She believed that this man standing in front of her was God from heaven who entered into our created time-frame from eternity.

It's important to note that when Jesus said, *Whoever lives and believes in me will never die* the original Greek more literally translates: *Whoever lives and believes in me will definitely not die into eternity*. Jesus was not negating the fact that we stop breathing and our bodies decay. Lazarus' body lay only a short distance away. To die into eternity means to suffer the forsaken, hopeless existence of the damned in hell.

Life radiates and spills over so enormously through Christ that He is the Resurrection and the Life. Anyone who has Christ will definitely not die into eternity. That person will live for all eternity.

It may seem easy for us here and now to talk about the resurrection and living forever in heaven. But it's not so easy when we're confronted with the reality of death. Just as it wasn't so easy for the disciples in those dark days of Holy Week to imagine that Jesus would rise again. In fact, it is impossible for our natural minds to grasp a life that overpowers death. Some try to brush off death's reality with a sort of sappy, superstitious sentimental thoughts about heaven – like everyone is going to go there if they're good enough, or that Grandpa is looking down on us or that we turn into angel in heaven – the kind of theology you might draw from a County Music song. Others try to deny death's sting with a New Age-ish notion of being part of the cosmic energy or they console themselves with the notion of living on in people's memories. Some just try to ignore it all together and not think about it. But when you see a body in a casket, or receive the grim prognosis from the doctor, when you learn about an old classmate who died unexpectedly, or when you are lying in bed and your heart starts laboring at the thought of your own end, when you hear about so many natural disasters, earthquakes and floods and death seems to be all around us, there is nothing harder to believe than a resurrection.

Even worse is to contemplate such things with a guilty conscience. The worst death of all is to face it with uncertainty because of unresolved guilt. But then we must not think of what to do. We must erase everything on our minds and think of only one name: Christ. Shortly after He

raised Lazarus, Christ would be taking all of our guilt to the cross and by His suffering and death would atone for our guilt on our behalf. He dove into death but broke death open so that neither guilt nor death has any hold on us before God. In the name of Christ all guilt and all death disappear. Because of Christ, all sins are forgiven, all regrets erased, all uncertainty filled in. You have Christ. You have life. You have a clear conscience. You have holiness. You have peace. You have eternity.

Christ doesn't tell us to do anything or to follow a certain regimen or to study a certain philosophy or to look to our inner strength to have all this. HE DOESN'T EVEN SAY YOU HAVE TO PRAY AND ASK FOR IT. He simply says, *I am. I am the Resurrection and the Life.*

Then to punctuate it John 11 says, *Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out.* Had Jesus not said the name Lazarus, had He just said the words "come out," I suppose *all* the dead throughout the world would have come out of their graves. That is the power of Christ because He is the resurrection.

What a wonder that He comes from heaven then, and gives Himself to you, body and blood, under the bread and wine of the Sacrament, and you receive into yourself the Resurrection and the Life. Nothing can ever stop you from living.

Therefore, let Christ be everything to you. Let Christ always be your answer, your hope, your certainty, your identity, your rescue, your reason for living, your existence and your very life. For He promises that whoever believes in Him will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Him will not die into eternity.