

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

I heard the story of a woman in Arkansas was sitting in her car in a parking lot when she heard a loud bang and then felt a sharp pain in the back of her head. She reached back and felt the warm sticky substance on the back of her head and realized that she had been shot. Her life flashed in front of her eyes – all the things she had done, and not done, all the people she was leaving behind. She was holding her hands behind her head weeping when someone walked by and asked, "Are you OK?" The woman answered, "I've been shot in the head, and I'm holding my brains in." Well, it wasn't her brains. It was dough. A Pillsbury biscuit canister had exploded in the back seat, apparently from the heat, making a loud explosion and shooting dough into the back of the woman's head.

Like this woman we all have to come to terms with our own mortality at some point. Last week I turned 59, that means I am going to turn 60 next year. I have begun to think about death much more than I use to. There are some here today that faced crisis during the past year when uncertain medical reports came that could have indicated uncertain futures. Christmas and Easter are all about life. Jesus was born to die. His resurrection shows us that we can face death with certainty instead of fear.

John 11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

In Jewish belief, when a person passed away their soul remained near the body for 3 days. It was customary for friends and relatives to come and comfort the family especially during these days. Lazarus had been in the grave now for 4 days which meant that all hope was lost.

All of us will one day face death. It pays no regard to education or social standing or economic success – it is the great equalizer. As long as you have been living, you have been dying. Death is a thief that steals the most valuable things in your life; family, friends, loved ones. In the face of hopelessness, Jesus shows us death is a weakling that has been conquered. He does this in 3 ways;

1. By Words - Jesus told us there was nothing to fear

When Jesus walked the earth, He told His disciples that they did not need to fear death.

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Martha ran out to meet Jesus as He arrived. When she met Him, her words were clear “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” The emphasis here seems to be on the fact that she knew that Jesus was able to help. She believed that Jesus was the Christ. She had seen the miracles and believed that he would have been able to heal her brother. However, 4 days had gone by. Lazarus’ soul was gone now, it was too late. Yes, she knew she would see him again in heaven – but he was gone.

Have you ever felt like that? You face a difficulty and, when God doesn’t respond in the way you expected, you are confused. Jesus responded to her by saying that He WAS the day of resurrection. That He IS life. To be with Jesus is to be with life.

There is the story of the man that fell off a cliff and was hanging on from the branch of a tree. He yelled “is anyone up there!” and a voice boomed back “yes, I am here”. He asked “can you help me” and the voice replied “yes, but first you have to let go of the branch”. He yelled back “is there anyone else up there!”

2. By Deed - Jesus showed us there was nothing to fear

As the old expression goes “talk is cheap”. Like the song in the movie My Fair Lady “show me!” Jesus not only told us that we should not fear death, He touched death and showed that it could be beaten. His words were followed by action.

As a young man, D.L. Moody was called upon suddenly to preach a funeral sermon. He hunted all throughout the four Gospels trying to find one of Christ's funeral sermons, but searched in vain. He found that Christ broke up every funeral he ever attended. Death could not exist where he was. When the dead heard his voice they sprang to life. Look at the story of Jairus' daughter;

Luke 8:52 Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." 53 They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. 54 But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" 55 Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat.

There is also the story of the widow's son;

Luke 7:12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out--the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." 14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother

In the story we are looking at today, we see that Jesus proved His words with actions;

John 11:39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days." 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

On May 28 1914 a ship called the Express of Ireland hit another ship and began to sink quickly. As the ship began to sink in the cold Atlantic Ocean it was discovered that there were not enough life belts on board for all the passengers. On that ship were 130 Salvation Army officers—109 were drowned and not one body that was picked up had on a life belt. The few survivors told how the Salvation Army Christians took off their own belts and strapped them even upon strong men, saying, “I can die better than you can”. From the deck of that ship was demonstrated what it means to live with a new priority, passion and power.

3. By Example – Jesus rose to show us there is nothing to fear

Even after Jesus words and deeds the disciples did not really believe. When they saw Jesus die on the cross their hopes and dreams died with Him. His resurrection showed once and for all that death had been conquered. He shows that where he went, we can follow.

Max Lucado in his book *Six Hours One Friday* tells the story of a missionary in Africa working in a village where many people became sick. The nearest clinic was just a few hours walk but there was a problem. On the way to the clinic there was a stream that had to be crossed. The water in the stream was not deep, only a couple of feet, but the people of this tribe were deathly afraid of water. They believed that spirits inhabited the water so they never went near it.

The missionary led the people of the village to the stream and then spoke with them, telling them that there was nothing to fear. There were no evil spirits in the water. Still, they would not go near. He then walked over and splashed water on his face, showing them that even after touching the water that no harm came to him. There was nothing to fear. Still, they would go near. He then dove in and came up on the other side of the river, showing once for all that it could not harm them.

Dr. Robert Hughes' (Lutheran Theological Seminary) father was a coal-miner in north-eastern Pennsylvania. His job was to check the mines for methane gas before the miners went down into the mines. Every morning he would descend alone into the mines, taking with him the safety light, and he would check out each of the tunnels and shafts of the mine to make sure that there was no deadly methane gas present. Of course, if the light of the safety lamp would so much as flicker, he would have to run for his life because it would detect the presence of methane gas. And then after checking the mine, he would rise up to the surface, and there would be all the miners gathered around expectantly waiting for him to announce, "It's OK; it's safe; you can now go down into the mine." And as Dr. Hughes used the illustration, he said, "That's what Christ has done for us. Coming up out of the depths of death, he has announced to all who are gathered here in this life on earth: 'It's OK; it's safe. You can enter into death, into the darkness and the unknown. It's safe because I have been there and checked it out. It has not been victorious over me. I have overcome it, and I will be with you in death even as I have been with you in life.'"