St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Sermon: "If only"
Scripture: John 11:21-27
Rev. Steve Filyk
November 8, 2026
Anniversary Service
St. Peter's Anglican Church, Monte Creek

John 11:21-27

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. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
27 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Thanks to you, Bishop Barbara
And to all of you here at St. Peter's
For this invitation to stand before you
On this very special Remembrance Sunday;
On this very special Anniversary Sunday.

Today we have already reflected on the lives
Of three men who died while serving their country.
Imagine the "If only…" questions their families had asked.
If only he hadn't signed up for the infantry.
If only he had been more careful.
If only we had persuaded him to stay.

These old stories bring up recent loss in Wainwright.
We can imagine similar questions
Being raised by fellow soldiers, their leadership,
and by the loved ones of the injured and departed.
Perhaps events in our own life
Have caused you to ask that question: "If only..."

Life isn't supposed to end prematurely.
Children aren't supposed to die before their parents.
Young men and women aren't supposed to be taken
In the prime of lives.

In today's Gospel reading,
we hear Martha lamenting to Jesus
"if… you had been here, my brother would not have died." (John 11:21 NIV)
"If only".

PAUSE
Compared to the other Gospels,

the Gospel of John, the source of today's reading,
is a more deliberate and contemplative account
of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

John reflects on a smaller set of miracles, which he calls signs.
These signs aren't simply demonstrations of Jesus' power.
They help us understand who Jesus is.

Today's reading comes from the story
of the seventh and final sign in John's Gospel.

The background (which we didn't read)
involves a family of siblings who are close to Jesus.
When one of the siblings, Lazarus, falls sick
The others send a messenger to Jesus.
They want Jesus to come and heal their brother.

But when Jesus receives the message,
he doesn't come immediately.
Although he loves this family,
And they are only a day away,
he intentionally delays his departure.

This is part of the tension in the story.

Finally Jesus makes the trip
But by the time he arrives, Lazarus is already dead.

When Martha hears that Jesus is coming
She goes out to him to greet him, saying:
"if you had been here,
my brother would not have died.
But I know that even now
God will give you whatever you ask."

Martha is disappointed, but still holds on to hope.
When Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again,
she affirms her belief in the resurrection at the end of time.

But then Jesus declares: "I am the resurrection and the life.
The one who believes in me will live,
even though they die;
and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

Martha may believe in an end-time resurrection
But Jesus is revealing something more.
He is the resurrection and the life.
The resurrection isn't a distant date on the calendar—it's a person.

Jesus asks her: "Do you believe this?"
Note that he doesn't ask whether she understands

How this might work…
Jesus' question is about trust.
Martha confesses: "I believe".

What follows is remarkable.
Jesus goes out to the graveyard
And despite Martha's protest about the smell,
Jesus has the tomb opened.

He calls out Lazarus' name: "Lazarus, come out!"
And Lazarus emerges alive from the tomb.

PAUSE

In this final sign in the Gospel of John, Jesus demonstrates
His lordship and authority over life and death.
Ironically, not everyone is impressed by his miracle.
The religious leaders worried that Jesus' growing following
will start a revolution that will invite a Roman backlash.
Their response is to plot to kill both Jesus and Lazarus.

All of this raises an important question
Why does Jesus bother?
By raising Lazarus, he hasn't freed the man
From the ongoing challenges of living.
Lazarus has gone on to live another day,
but will one day die for good.

Jesus doesn't perform this wonder
To offer him or us guarantees of life
free from suffering and loss.
Jesus is teaching us that eternal life is found in him.
It's a life that begins now,
continues through death,
and stretches into eternity.

Eternal life?
This can be difficult to believe.
Our modern, disenchanted world
warns us to trust only what we can see, taste, or touch.

Yet none of this goes very far
In answering life's biggest questions.
Why are we so troubled by death?
Why are we so interested in justice?
Why do we find ourselves longing for a life
Where love and relationships last.
When we put our trust in Jesus
We won't get all of our questions answered,

We will still have our "if only" moments.
We will still wonder why things happened as they did.
We will still grieve those we have lost.

But the Christian faith doesn't rest on having all the answers.
It rests on knowing the One who holds the answers.
The One who entered into our suffering.
The One who stood at the tomb of his friend and wept.
The One who would soon face death himself.
And the One who broke the power of death through his resurrection.

Jesus doesn't simply promise us
that there will be a resurrection someday.
He says: "I am the resurrection and the life."
And so, even when we cannot understand what God is doing,
Even when life leaves us with more questions than answers,
Even when we find ourselves saying, "If only..."
We can still put our trust in him.

Because our hope isn't ultimately in what we know,
But in the One we know.
May God give us eyes to see and hearts to trust.
To God be all the glory. Amen.