

## Death is not final. God is.

Message for Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

**Scripture:** John 11:1-44

Note: This message is largely based on a book by Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones*.

### 1) A funeral is interrupted

You are leaving the church building. The funeral is over. It's a country church, and the burial will occur in the cemetery next door. Ahead of you walk six men who carry the coffin that carries the body of your son. Your only son.

You're numb from shock and sorrow. Stunned. You lost your husband, and now you've lost your son. Now you have no family. If you had any more tears, you'd weep. If you had any more faith, you'd pray. But both are in short supply, so you do neither. You just stare at the back of the wooden box.

Suddenly it stops. The pallbearers have stopped. You stop.

A man is blocking the path. You don't know him. You've never seen him before. He wasn't at the funeral. He's dressed in a corduroy coat and jeans. You have no idea what he is doing. But before you can object, he steps up to you and says, "Don't cry."

*Don't cry? Don't cry! My son is dead! And you tell me not to cry? Who are you and what are you doing here?* Those are your thoughts, but they never become your words. Because before you can speak, he acts.

He turns back to the coffin, places his hand on it, and says in a loud voice, "Young man, I tell you, get up!"

One of the pallbearers, a friend of the family, steps forward. "Hey fella, what do you think you're —."

But a sudden movement in the casket interrupts the question. The pallbearers look at one another, and quickly lower the casket to the ground, just as the lid opens.

Does this sound like something from some mystery movie? It's not. It's right out of the Gospel of Luke in the Bible:

Luke 7:14-15, Today's English Version:

Then he walked over and touched the coffin, and the men carrying it stopped. Jesus said, "Young man! Get up, I tell you!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

But it's not always that way.

### 2) A funeral is not interrupted

Martha can tell you. She had hoped Jesus would show up to heal her brother Lazarus. Martha must have thought, *Surely he will come. Didn't he help the leper? Didn't he give sight to the blind? And they were strangers. Lazarus is his friend. When he gets the message that Lazarus is sick, he'll be here in a heartbeat.*

Her brother drifted in and out of consciousness. "Hang on, Lazarus. He'll be here soon" she promised.

But the knock at the door never came. Jesus never appeared. Not to help. Not to heal. Not even to bury. And now — *four days later* — he has the nerve to show his face!

She hears he's at the edge of town, so she storms out to meet him.

John 11:21, Today's English Version:

Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!"

There is hurt in those words. The one man who could have made a difference didn't, and Martha wants an answer.

Maybe you do, too. Someone you love walks near the edge of life, and you turn to Jesus for help.

*God, where were you? If you're really out there, then why weren't you here when we needed you? My husband would have survived. My baby would still be here. If only you'd heard my prayer, God, my arms wouldn't be empty.*

### 3) God's answer to our needs

Jesus reassures Martha, "Your brother will rise again." [John 11:23].

Martha misunderstands. (Who wouldn't?) "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." [John 11:24].

That wasn't what Jesus meant. So he says it as plain as possible:

**John 11:25-26, Today's English Version:**  
 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die."

But that's not all. Jesus looks Martha lovingly in the eye and asks her the most important question found in the entire Bible.

**John 11:26, Today's English Version:**  
 "Do you believe this?"

That question is meant for you and me as much as it was meant for Martha. It's easy to believe in God when things are going great. But what about when tragedy strikes?

Martha answered that question just as plainly:

**John 11:27, Today's English Version:**  
 "Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Even with her tears and her fears, even with her disappointment, she knew that there was no one else in the world she would want to turn to when she needed help. Let's remember that Martha made this confession of faith *before* the miracle happened. She trusted her Lord, regardless what the outcome was going to be.

Will you pray this with me out loud: *No matter what happens, Lord I will trust you.*

Martha, her sister Mary, and Jesus walk to the tomb where Lazarus' body lays. When Jesus sees it, he begins to cry. Not for the dead, mind you. His tears are for the living. He feels their pain.

*Jesus feels your pain, too.* Whatever kind of heartache or trouble you're going through, know that Jesus is with you, and he shares your pain.

All through the stories of Jesus in the Bible, Jesus is constantly in trouble with the religious leaders. He has this annoying habit of doing things and saying things that only God can do and say. Now he's going to do it again.

Jesus makes another of those statements that assign him either to the throne of God in heaven or else to a padded cell in a lunatic asylum. Note that he doesn't say this in a whisper (just in case it doesn't work). No, he shouts it out for the whole world to hear:

**John 11:43, Today's English Version:**  
 He called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

Want to know what happened next? Let John tell you:

**John 11:44, Today's English Version:**  
 He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and with a cloth around his face. "Untie him," Jesus told them, "and let him go."

Death is not final. Jesus has overcome death, and he shares that victory with us.

Just because Jesus brought the *dead* back to life, doesn't mean he won't do the same for the *living*. He asks you the single greatest question you'll ever answer:

**Do you believe in me?**

Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? In other words, is he everything to you?

If so, then he wants to bring you abundant life, to give you living water, to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Trust him and follow him.

### **Next Steps:**

OK, that makes sense. But what does that look like in everyday life? Here is what I suggest:

- Talk with God in prayer and say, "OK, Lord, I'm yours. I am willing and I'm ready to trust you, to follow you, to obey you. Where do you want me to start?"
- And then do whatever your heart desires! That may sound surprising. Let me explain: when we surrender our lives to God, God begins the work of transforming us to be more like Jesus. Our values change, our desires, our priorities, and so on. So what we desire becomes ever closer to what God desires.

Use this with discretion, though. Let us be aware that we are not yet there.