

The promise of Resurrection
a sermon by
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Text: John 11:1-3, 15-27, 41-44 (see reverse of page)

The story of the miraculous raising of Lazarus is among the most provocative of all the stories of Jesus. Within the gospel of John, it is the last and the greatest of the evangelist's seven miracle stories. As a resurrection story, the raising of Lazarus foreshadows what is to come, God's raising of Jesus on Easter Day, just a week away.

The story of the dying and raising of Lazarus also expresses the deepest yearnings of families with a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia. Mary and Martha called for Jesus because their brother was dying. And when he died, they could not and *would* not let him go. They hung on to Lazarus, hoping against hope that Lazarus was not dead, that Lazarus, even if he were dead, could somehow be brought back to them.

And that is the experience of Alzheimer families. As they watch their loved one's mind slip away from them, entering what Ronald Reagan called "the long sunset at the end of life", they yearn for life to rise up once again in their loved one. They pray that she will rise up out of dementia and return to the world of laughter and love, reading and writing, speaking and remembering. They cry out for her to speak but one more time.

Joe and his children lived and endured these days with Mary Frances. They shared these days with wife, mother, grandmother. And now for them, as for Mary Frances, that part of their life journey is over.

The Lazarus story speaks of our deepest yearnings for THIS life, and our deepest faith and hope for what lies beyond this life. The Lazarus story is about resurrection. Resurrection from the dead, and resurrection into eternal life.

Jesus commands, and Lazarus comes forth. God speaks, and his word comes to pass. God loves, and lives are forever changed.

The hope of the resurrection is at the center of Christian faith. But resurrection is not simply our HOPE. Resurrection is what *God promises*. And it is a very special and very comforting promise.

For resurrection is not merely a continuation of what we experience. Resurrection is not simply an extension of life as we know it. Resurrection is not even a restoration of what we once had in life but lost along the way through illness or injury or dementia. Resurrection is a raising up out of death into a new and wonderful and totally unexplainable kind of life: an everlasting communion with God and with all of the saints.

Resurrection is the promised hope that awaits all who are united with God through Jesus Christ. Those whom we think of as whole in body and spirit. And those whose bones have become brittle and whose bodies are frail. Those with bright minds and a quick wit. And those whose minds and energies have been snatched from them by dementia or disease. Resurrection is the promised hope that awaits ALL the saints, for all the saints stand in need of God's powerful resurrection.

Friends: This is the word of the Lord: *in Jesus Christ we have a promised hope that we will be raised into new and wonderful, Holy Communion with God!* This is the word of the Lord for you. Now, may you find comfort in these words. AMEN. OVER

John 11:1-3, 15-27, 41-44

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." [Jesus replied] ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."