

29 March 2020: Fifth Sunday of Lent: John 11:17-44

“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” With these words the grieving Martha greets Jesus, and a scene unfolds that climaxes with the raising of Lazarus. This cry of anguished, impotent grief contains an accusation: why weren’t you here to save him. Presently Mary makes the same statement to Jesus. The crowd then murmurs an even stronger indictment: *“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

In raising Lazarus Jesus is not trying to convince anyone that resurrection of the dead is possible. Martha, Mary and the crowd believe in resurrection; Martha firmly states, *“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”* Jesus says to Martha, *“I AM the Resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die...”* I AM the Resurrection and the life. In John’s Gospel Jesus makes many “I AM” statements: I AM the Good Shepherd; I AM the door of the sheep...the Bread of Heaven...the living water...the Light of the world. Jesus says, I AM just as God spoke to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3:14: God said to Moses, *“Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM’ has sent me to you..”*

I AM—these are words of divine self-disclosure. I AM the Resurrection and the life: Jesus is not merely the cause or giver of resurrection Jesus is the future event of new life. Fellowship with Christ is participation in the divine life which finds its fullest expression in triumph over death. Jesus does not deny a general resurrection at the last day, but there is an insistence that for those in fellowship with Jesus, the resurrection life is already present reality. It might be said that Resurrection is breaking into human experience backwards from the future: what will be true and real *then* is beginning to be true and real *now*; what we are experiencing in Christ now will find perfect fulfillment at the Last Day. Resurrection in Jesus from death to new life is not a theoretical possibility for the future, it is present here and now in those with faith in the great I AM: *“...those who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...”*.

Do not worry if, at times, you do not feel very much like you are being resurrected, or if the world does not seem to see much resurrection in you. It is to be expected. At times we will not ‘feel’ very resurrected, our progress will likely seem slow indeed. This is as it should be, since those feelings we sometimes feel so intensely are also those which are the most fleeing. Most of us go through 3, 4 or more mood changes every day: they can be dependent on things as inconsequential as what we had for lunch, or if someone has spoken to us in anger. The vast majority of what makes us who we are is very deep within us. For Christ to bring our deep, true selves to resurrection will take a good deal of time and detachment. Do not worry; have faith in the Lord of Life, open your deep self to the great I AM and leave resurrection to Christ. For encouragement, remember the details of the story of Lazarus. The disciples appear thoroughly confused over the whole episode; Mary, Martha and the crowd are fixated on the past; I am certain that Lazarus himself was more than a little disoriented when he awoke in his stinking tomb. Resurrection is in Christ; it is not work we accomplish. Have faith and, though you die, yet shall you live.

Neither must we be concerned that the world may be disinterested or hostile to resurrection life in us. While some of the crowd believed in Jesus after Lazarus was released from death’s bondage, others went blabbing to the Pharisees. In John’s Gospel, the raising of Lazarus is a decisive event: henceforth Jesus’ opponents firmly resolve to destroy him (cf. John 15:45ff). The event of resurrection, whether in Lazarus, or us, or Jesus, will not convert evil; only faith in Jesus who is the Resurrection does that. To those without faith, the signs of resurrection in you and me will more likely cause great fear, resentment and hostility.

A week from today we begin Holy Week in which will experience the pre-eminent signs of resurrection life. The Palms and Passion Gospel; the foot washing and the Lord’s Supper; The Watch, the Cross, the suffering and death. All the words, actions and symbols of Holy Week are absurd and uncomfortable to those without faith. For us, who even now are being resurrected by the I AM of Resurrection, these absurdities are the signs and wonders and media of our resurrected life in Jesus Christ. Each sign testifies to the power of Jesus over all things in earth and heaven, over all things in life and death. As we come we testify with our sisters and brothers, with saints and angels; we place ourselves on the holy ground of God’s revelation and we raise our voices with all creation in its never-ending song of praise, acknowledging before all that is and was and ever shall be that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus is God’s great self-declaration. Jesus Christ is God’s I AM. Amen.