

## I Am the Resurrection

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus said to Martha, “I am the Resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”** Here ends our text.

There once were two women who were roommates in the cardiac ward of the hospital. They had each suffered heart attacks and were now undergoing testing for upcoming bypass surgery. They struck up a conversation about some of their fears and hopes about their surgery. The first woman confessed, “I know there’s a chance that we might die, but you just have to have faith. I keep telling myself that I’m going to pull through. I believe that after the surgery I’ll be all right and will live normally again.” The second woman asked, “Do you know who your doctor is and what experience he has?” The first woman replied, “No, I can’t remember his name. I’ve never met him. But it doesn’t matter. I have faith that I’ll be healed.” At that moment the doctor for the second woman entered the room, introduced himself, and pulled up a chair. He explained to her the details of her bypass surgery which he was soon to perform. He told her that he had done this operation thousands of times. He hadn’t lost a patient yet. She could trust him to heal her heart. He asked if she had any questions or reservations. The second woman replied, “No, I have faith in you that you’ll heal my heart so I can live normally again.” The first woman had faith in the results of the surgery. It was more or less, wishful thinking that she would be healed. But the second woman had faith in the one who would provide the results. She believed in the one who would heal her.

In the Apostles’ Creed we conclude with the statement, “I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” We believe in the resurrection. We’re putting our faith in a future event. We believe that after we die, on the Last Day we’ll rise again. We believe in the results which that Day will bring. But is this just wishful thinking? If we believe hard enough in this event, does that mean we will indeed be raised from the dead? Yes, we have faith, but just what or who do we put our faith in? Do we believe in the results or do we believe in the one who provides the results?

In the days of the New Testament, there was some debate about the resurrection on the Last Day. On one side there were the Sadducees, who were the theological liberals of their day. Just like the historical critics of our day, they didn’t believe in angels or miracles or even in the resurrection of the body. You died and maybe your spirit lived on, but that was it for the body. After all, they knew what dead bodies looked like after just a few days of decomposing in the grave. There’s no raising that. But on the other side of the debate were the Pharisees. They believed in angels and the miracles of the prophets and even in the resurrection of the body on the Last Day, at least for the people of God. They believed in the vision God gave to Ezekiel about the people of Israel rising from their graves. Ezekiel said of them, “There was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them . . . and breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet.” The Pharisees had faith in the resurrection. They believed in the future results, but did they believe in the one who provides those results?

In our gospel reading today, Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus that their brother and his friend Lazarus was very ill. Could the doctor come and perform some lifesaving miracle? Jesus receives their message, but he delays his coming. He receives their prayer, but he doesn’t answer right away. In the meantime, Lazarus dies and is buried. When Jesus finally does arrive, Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days. Family and friends are in the middle of their week of mourning. When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went to meet him. In her pain and grief she complains a little to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” And isn’t that how we sometimes speak to God when our prayer isn’t answered according to our liking – when we don’t get the result we’re after. In our pain, we put a little blame on God. But then in faith Martha tempers her statement. She says, “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” She no longer dictates her desired results to Jesus. She lets God’s will be

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done. She knows that Jesus' will and God's will are one and the same. "Jesus, you ask God for me. I know that your will is best for me. I'll take the results you give me, whatever they may be."

Jesus comforts Martha with the words, "Your brother will rise again." These are words that we've spoken many times to comfort friends and family when they mourn the death of loved ones. "Your mother - your father - your sister or brother - your friend will rise again." And Martha believes this. Just like the Pharisees, she believes in the resurrection. She says, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Martha trusts in this future event of the resurrection. She has faith in the coming results.

But Jesus wants her to trust not only in the promised results but in the one who provides the results. He wants her to trust in him. He tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life." "To believe in the resurrection is to believe in me. I am the one who provides the resurrection. I cause the resurrection. And more than that, I am the resurrection. You trust in the healing. Trust in me for I am the healer. I am the resurrection."

And then Jesus tells Martha a little riddle. "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." How can we believe in Jesus, then die, then live, but never die? First off, when we believe in Jesus, our old unbelieving man dies and our new believing man lives. The old spirit dies but the new spirit lives. This is the spiritual death and life that takes place at our conversion when we believe in Jesus. In another sense, when we believe in Jesus, though our body still dies physically as a consequence of sin, at the resurrection our body will live again. This is bodily death and life, which takes place when our body dies and then is physically resurrected on the Last Day. Finally, when we believe in Jesus, we will never suffer eternal death and separation from God, but will live eternally in heaven in both spirit and body. We'll never die eternally. This is how we die, live, and never die.

After this mind twister, Jesus then asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" By the power of the Holy Spirit, Martha simply confesses the most important thing, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." Martha believes in Jesus. And because she believes in Jesus, she believes in the resurrection and the life everlasting. Jesus has succeeded in transferring Martha's trust in future results to himself, the one who provides the results.

Now that Martha's faith is focused on Jesus, he grants her prayer. He doesn't wait until the Last Day, but he raises Lazarus from the dead then and there. Jesus shows that he has the power to raise a decomposed body from the grave. Bone comes together with bone again, sinews reattach, flesh is rehydrated, and living skin stretches out the wrinkles. Breath enters Lazarus. His spirit returns. He lives again and stands on his feet. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and to prove it, he gives resurrection and life to Lazarus.

There were others there that day who saw what Jesus did and believed in him. But some of them ran back to the Pharisees and reported that Jesus had raised a man from the dead. Now the Pharisees don't deny the miracle which Jesus did. They believe in the resurrection. But they don't believe in Jesus who is the resurrection and the life. So instead, they make plans to put Jesus to death. But in so doing, they also plan their own death, their eternal death. For though Jesus will come again to raise all the dead, the unbelievers will rise to eternal death. It doesn't do any good to believe in the resurrection if you don't believe in Jesus.

Even the prophet Job in the Old Testament first confessed his faith in Christ his Redeemer, and then he confessed his faith in the resurrection which Jesus provides. Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another." Job believed in the resurrection, but he first believed in Jesus who is the Resurrection.

That's why *before* we confess in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting," we first confess, "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord, who was . . . crucified, died, and was buried. The third day he rose again from the dead." We first believe in Jesus Christ. We first believe in the healer and then we believe in the healing. We first believe in the one who is the resurrection and then we believe in the resurrection. We first believe in him who is life and then we believe in the life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.