

TITLE: I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

TEXT: JOHN 11: 17-26

GOD’S WORD: EPHESIANS 2:1-10

I – NEIGHBOR’S FLOWERS:

I was thinking this week about a neighbor I had across from the parsonage in Crestline. It was this time of the year as I looked across the street at her house that I saw Spring beauty. There in the flower beds, which circled her house, were all kinds of beautiful spring flowers. There were different colors of crocus poking their heads up and in bloom. The yellow daffodils were standing tall and the sunlight made their colors brilliant. Then there were the hyacinths with their vivid purple standing out against the dark brick of the house. The sight brought a smile to my face and my heart in the middle of the chaotic season of Easter.

Then I grew a little sad. This neighbor lady had passed away while I lived there and the thought struck me that she would not see this sight herself this year or ever again. She had worked for years to plant all these flowers, put all the bulbs in the ground and had tended to them for years and now she does not have the joy of seeing them bloom. Her family used to come to her empty house once a week and tended the yard and kept the flowerbeds looking nice, but she doesn’t benefit from any of it, only those like me who take time to glance towards the house. The house sold and I moved so I’m not even sure the sight still takes place each Spring.

As I continued to think about it through that day my sadness turned back to joy when I realized that this whole issue was the Easter story! As I thought about it and turned it over in my mind I realized two things. The flowers remind us of the resurrection and Christians enjoy the hard work of someone else, of Jesus the Christ, as my neighbor lady now does.

II - FLOWERS TELL THE STORY:

I think it’s appropriate that churches all over the world are decorated this morning with flowers such as crocus, daffodils, hyacinths, lilies and tulips. I have come to believe that these flowers bloom during the spring at Easter time as a reminder from God of what He’s done for us. If you know anything about these flowers you can see that the story of God’s love and the resurrection is embodied in them.

Each of these flowers comes from a bulb. They grow and give birth to green stems and leaves and then vivid flowers. But they have a life span, they bloom, they show off, and then they wither and die. But they don't really die. A gardener will tell you that when the flower fades and the plant starts to brown up and wither, don't cut it off. The bulb is drawing energy and nutrients from these dying leaves and stems and storing them in the bulb. The bulb then goes dormant until God again sends spring and calls them forth from the ground and the energy they stored while they were alive last season allows them to again come forth in splendor.

That's the hope of Christianity isn't it? We're born as beautiful creations of God. Just like the flowers of spring we all have different appearances, different colors, and different life spans. But we do all have a life span. At some time we will start to wither and die. Our promise from God is that when we go dormant we will bloom again if we have taken in the right energy and nutrients while alive. This energy and food can be found in only one source...JESUS, THE SON OF GOD! In this morning's reading from Ephesians Paul told us that our ability to live again comes to us from a God who loves us and a Savior who died for us:

⁴But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, ⁵that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's special favor that you have been saved!) ⁶For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms—all because we are one with Christ Jesus.

III – TEXT:

In this morning's text we find Jesus telling us in his own words that he is the one who gives us this new life and resurrection. It is only through our belief in him that we are allowed to live again. It is the story of Lazarus.

To refresh your memories Jesus considered Lazarus and his two sister's Martha and Mary to be dear personal friends. He often stayed with them when his ministry brought him to the area. He was about 20 miles away preaching and teaching one day when a messenger from the sisters arrived and told Jesus Lazarus was sick and dying and asking Jesus to come and help. Jesus did not go immediately, but finished his obligations there and then traveled to Bethany. We pick up the story there at verse 17.

John 11:17 - 26 (NLT)

¹⁷When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. ¹⁸Bethany

was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem,¹⁹ and many of the people had come to pay their respects and console Martha and Mary on their loss.²⁰ When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed at home.²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴“Yes,” Martha said, “when everyone else rises, on resurrection day.”

²⁵Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again.²⁶ They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish. Do you believe this, Martha?”

Jesus travels for a day and arrives to be told that Lazarus had indeed died and had been buried four days ago. This was no surprise to Jesus; He had purposefully delayed his trip to Bethany and knew that Lazarus would die because this would allow him to show others his life giving powers and the message of resurrection. Indeed there were many witnesses to what was about to happen. Lazarus and the sisters were well known and liked and family and friends and other townspeople who were helping them mourn the death of their brother surrounded the sisters.

When they heard that Jesus was coming into town Martha, the more aggressive and outspoken of the two sisters went out to meet him. As I look at verse 21 it's easy to think that Martha was a little upset with Jesus and was chastising him for not dropping everything and coming to help Lazarus, yet the next verse tells us she was a sister of persistent faith and would have to trust that Jesus knew what he was doing. Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again and she thinks Jesus is talking about a general resurrection where everyone will live again.

But that's not what Jesus is saying. He then gives her his most comforting and majestic of the “I AM” passages we've been studying. He says “I am the resurrection and the life” and that everyone who believes in him will not die like everyone else, but will have eternal life.

The point is made vivid when the end of the story tells us that Jesus went to the tomb and had the stone rolled away and shouted, “Lazarus, Come out” and he did.

IV – THE HOPE & PROMISE OF EASTER:

It's easy get the idea that the story of Easter is all about Jesus, but it's not, it's really all about us! Jesus did not come to earth to put on a show, he came to earth for us. God didn't send him here to be rich and famous, God didn't send him here to be a hero, God sent him here to give us hope and promise. The resurrection wasn't for Jesus it was for us.

Easter morning proves that resurrection isn't just a cute story or a myth it's a reality. God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to go through a week of brutality and death so that we could have the hope of standing before the throne of God as a perfect child. We know we're not perfect, each and every one of us knows we've made mistakes, each and every one of us knows that we have sinned against God. The death of Jesus gives us the hope of forgiveness. The Bible tells us that when we accept Jesus our sins are removed, they are put as far as the East is from the west, we are washed and whiter than snow. The only hope I have of perfection is found in Jesus who died for me. The Jesus who proclaimed "I am the resurrection and the life."

The promise of Easter is that we will live again. On that first Easter morning God proved that he has the power to bring the dead back to life. God sacrificed his own Son, laid him in a tomb for three days and then brought him back to life to prove he could. When the women went to the tomb that morning and found the stone had been rolled away and the body of their Lord was missing the angels boldly proclaimed "HE ISN'T HERE! HE HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD! The promise is that the same statement can be made at the tomb of each and every one of us! He isn't here or she isn't here, they believed in Jesus and have eternal life! Easter occurs more than one Sunday a year. Easter occurs each and every time a Christian dies, knowing that our resurrected Savior is waiting for them and like Lazarus he calls them back to life.

V – FUNERAL WRECKER:

It's that promise that removes any sadness from me as I think about the death of my neighbor or any body else who knew Jesus, because I know that their bodies may have indeed withered and died, but their flowers are in full bloom in God's garden, they live on in heaven in the presence of God and the company of Jesus who led the way. And I'm guessing the Glory of God and the light of Jesus far outdoes the beauty of earthly flowers.

As I read the Gospels and the stories such as Lazarus I come to one very important conclusion I want to leave you with this Easter morning...

Jesus broke up every funeral he ever attended, including his own. I know that I look forward to my own Easter when he attends and breaks up mine.

The question for you today is this; "WILL HE BE AT YOURS?" If not don't you think this Easter morning would be a good time to invite him?

AMEN