

Rev. Samuel Gullixson Ser. #318-16

We pray: O Lord of Life, grant us all a blessed death. Amen.

*In the name of the Father, who created life, along with heaven & earth,  
and of the Son, who took on human life, suffered during His life,  
gave up His life in death, and rose to life from the dead,  
and of the Holy Spirit, who lives to resurrect the body  
and give life ✠ everlasting. Amen*

Dear fellow redeemed,

Our text today is another text from the Gospel of St. John,  
but it is not just another text.

In John's Gospel of 21 chapters, we are in the middle chapter,  
10 chapters both before and after.

And here, like in the middle of St. Matthew's Gospel  
where Peter boldly confesses, "**You are the Christ,  
the Son of the Living God,**"<sup>Matt.16:16</sup> we have a very clear  
confession of who Jesus is. One that He doesn't deny.

Only this time, it is not one of the 12 disciples confessing,  
nor is it during some lull in the action,  
but it is Martha, the dear friend of Jesus we met last week  
and she is grieving over the death of her brother, Lazarus.

What has happened up until our text is this: Lazarus became ill,  
so Mary&Martha sent for Jesus, hoping He would heal him.  
But Jesus didn't come. He even purposefully delayed coming,  
waiting two more days.

They buried Lazarus and closed the tomb.

And, evidently being well-known, many Jews from Jerusalem  
had even come to console them before Jesus finally came...  
4 days later.

What would you have said to Jesus?

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*We read as follows in Jesus' name.*

And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console  
their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was  
coming, she went and met Him, but Mary remained seated in the  
house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother  
would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask  
from God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will  
rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the  
resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "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. Do you  
believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the  
Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying  
in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she  
heard it, she rose quickly and went to Him.<sup>(ESV)</sup>

*So far the Words of our text.*

*These are Your Words, heavenly Father.*

**Sanctify [us] in the Truth. Your Word is Truth.** <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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I love this text because it is so true to our human experience,  
and our Christian experience struggling between life & death.  
Jesus finally comes, Martha was like many grieving Christians,  
confessing Him as Lord, yet rebuking in the same sentence.

"**Lord, if You had been here...** but You weren't.

Why? Was it too far for You? Didn't You love him?

Don't You love Mary and me?"

"**My brother would not have died...** but He did. And You let it.

Didn't I hear that You healed the centurion's servant

from far away with just Your Word,

yet You couldn't spare a single word for "**the one You love**"?

"**But I know that whatever You ask from God, He'll give You.**"

There's still a chance for You to make this right...if You want."

Then Jesus spoke to comfort her, "**Your brother will rise again.**"

And resigning herself to Lazarus' physical death and absence,  
she confesses the true Christian resurrection hope,  
almost with a tinge of hopelessness, "**I know that he'll rise  
again in the resurrection... on the last day.**"

But what about now? I am sad and suffering now..."

As it turns out, Jesus did actually raise Lazarus from the dead.

Called him out of the tomb 4 days after he'd been buried,  
reversing 4 days of biological decay and corruption.

This didn't make the High Priest and Jewish leaders too happy,  
since more people were coming to believe in Him.

And that makes sense, especially when you consider that  
the priests were mostly Sadducees who didn't believe  
in the resurrection of the dead.

**From that day on they made plans to put Jesus to death.** <sup>John11:53</sup>

But Jesus knew all this. He knew Lazarus was going to die.

He knew Martha and Mary would be grieving.

He knew He would raise Lazarus.

He knew this would incite the Jews even more to kill Him.

And yet He went through with it all, because His goal  
was not just to raise this one man, but all men.

To die bearing the sins of the world, and then to rise to life  
**as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** <sup>1Cor.15:20</sup>

But this text is important for another reason: It teaches us  
what Jesus would say to someone grieving at the death  
of another Christian.

How often have we gone to a Christian funeral or a viewing,  
wondering what we would say to the family/friends?

You wonder, what can I say to comfort them?

And the temptation is to try to come up with something new.

But you quickly realize that there isn't anything new to say.

It has already been said... a lot.

People have been dying since Cain killed Abel.

What can you say that is original AND meaningful? NOTHING!

So there you go, to comfort someone, not knowing what to say.

But now, you don't have to wonder how Jesus would have you  
comfort someone at a Christian's death...He tells you right here!

Now you're wondering what He said that you missed,  
so let's go over those words again so you can take them to heart.

**Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."**

**Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again  
in the resurrection on the last day."**

**Jesus said to her, "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.**

**Do you believe this?"**

Recognizing her grief, Jesus understands that she may not have  
the sharpest recollection of all that she believes.

For example: She knew He was God, and yet she said  
that Jesus wasn't there when Lazarus was sick and died.

Sure He was. He's God. He's everywhere.

But even more, wasn't Lazarus His?

Didn't He promise that He would never leave or forsake  
His people? <sup>Hebrews13:5</sup> And He never has.

But without reproving her rebuke or correcting her inaccuracies,  
He simply affirms the Christian hope of the resurrection,

**"Your brother will rise again."**

He draws her attention away from the death and her grief  
and leads her to life and hope.

She took the bait. Almost as if inspired and even with the pain

of grief, she started reciting Sabbath School lessons, confessing:  
**I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.**  
Resurrection wasn't a new teaching Jesus started in His day.  
It was taught throughout the whole Old Testament.

It was Abraham's hope and expectation if he had actually  
had to sacrifice his son Isaac.

...Now she wasn't thinking about herself and her loneliness.

Now she was thinking about God and His promises,  
even if still struggling with the death she sees before her.

Then Jesus takes her from this abstract idea about the resurrection,  
and points her to the concrete reality of it: Himself in the flesh.

**"I AM the resurrection and the life."** This 'I AM' statement  
is to recall to her mind another OT Sabbath School lesson.

Can you guess which one?

When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush.

Jesus is the **"I AM"** who sent Moses to lead Israel from Egypt.

The same God who created heaven and earth and all life;

Who promised to come through Eve's seed

to be bruised by the serpent while crushing his head;

Who had to die in the flesh so that He could rise in the flesh,

and lead us from spiritual and eternal death to life;

And Who is returning in the flesh to raise up me and all the dead,  
and will grant me and all believers in Christ life everlasting.

*This is most certainly true.*<sup>SC:3rdArt.</sup>

And thus giving her faith something concrete to anchor to,

He strengthens that faith by applying it to her current situation:  
the true reality of life and death.

**Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live,**

speaking of her physically dead brother Lazarus,

who yet was living with God.

**And everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die,**

speaking of her and Mary, who yet still alive in the flesh,

will someday also die physically, but never spiritually,

having their faith anchored in Christ.

Then Jesus asked her a question: **Do you believe this?"**

Do not misunderstand this question.

Jesus was not asking in order to find out if she believed.

He knew this too.

Instead, He was offering her an opportunity to confess

her Spirit-given faith, the same faith that she had learned

from her study of Scripture from little on and now had

come to see fulfilled in Jesus, **the Christ, the Son of God,**

**who is coming into the world.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, are you ready for death?

Whether it be your death or the death of a fellow Christian?

Now, you young people, I am not just talking to the older ones.

I'm talking to you, too.

Some day you will die, maybe sooner rather than later. God knows.

Some day you will have a death of a friend or family member.

What will you say? How will you comfort them?

How are you prepared for death?

Now, don't misunderstand the reason for my question.

I am not asking you in order to test your faith.

I am offering you an opportunity to remember and confess  
your faith in Jesus.

This is how one is truly prepared for a blessed death.

You are prepared for it the same way that Martha was:

by being led away from death and fear toward life and hope.

And isn't this the job of your pastors?

They teach you the Christian faith. They teach you of Jesus.

They teach you to confess your sins, publicly and privately.

They hear those confessions and they absolve.

They teach you to confess your Savior in the Creeds.

They teach you of Jesus' resurrection and His life.

They give you His **crucified and risen body and blood,**

and so they give you Jesus: your resurrection and life.

And when the inevitable occurs, on your death bed...they're there,  
not to teach you anything new, but to remind you  
of all those things you already know and confess:

the things you received in your Baptism,

the things you've learned in Sunday School,

in catechism and Confirmation class, in Bible Study.

The things you receive weekly in the Divine Service.

Why? Because in grief/distress, we focus on fear... not Jesus,  
but Jesus, being **Love, casts out fear.**<sup>1John4:18</sup>

...Jesus did raise Lazarus from the dead, 4 days into his decaying.

He is the same God who originally formed dust

and breathed into that dust the breath of life to make man.

Shall we then consider it too much to believe that He can

and will raise up all the dead on the Last Day,

whether it be 4 days or 4 centuries or 4 millenia after you die.

Then what do you have to fear of death?

Whether it be gradual or sudden, violent or peaceful,

painful or painless, it will be a blessed death in Jesus.

And do not be concerned that you have nothing new to say

to those who mourn and grieve over a Christian's death.

It isn't the new stuff that comforts, but the old, the eternal,

the learned and oft recited things.

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,**

**who comforts... so that we may be able to comfort...**

**with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted**

**by God.**<sup>2Corinthians1:3-4</sup>

The Lord grant you a blessed death, leading to life. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*