

April 28, 2013
Resurrection Stories

A Brother's Resurrection
John 11:38-44

Opening words: Everyone knows the Easter story. Jesus was resurrected from the dead! However, not everyone knows the other resurrection stories. Did you know, including Jesus, nine individuals in scripture were resurrected from the dead? Of those miraculous resurrections, three are found in the Old Testament. Three individuals were resurrected by Jesus himself. Both Peter and Paul raised a person from the dead. In addition, an untold number of saints were resurrected at Jesus' crucifixion. (Matthew 27:52-53) Many believe Paul was resurrected after he was stoned (Acts 14:19-20). Each one of these stories is important. In the future, I want to look at them all. However, I only have time to look at the three individuals Jesus resurrected.

I have called this sermon series *Resurrection Stories*. We began two weeks ago with the resurrection of Jairus' daughter. Last week, we looked at the resurrection of the widow's son. Today, we conclude with the resurrection of Lazarus. May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson, John 11:38-44. Let me call this message *A Brother's Resurrection*.

John 11:38-44

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

He was just 41 years old when he died. He had been working out at the gym and just collapsed. They called for an ambulance and they rushed him to the hospital. It was in the emergency room that they pronounced him dead. His work for God in this world was done, but his family had a few things left for him to do. The nightmare of my little brother's death has changed my world forever.

Those words were part of a blog I found on the Internet. The loss of a sibling is like no other. We think about the death of our parents. When you lose your second parent, you become part of the older generation. We worry about the death of our children. I pray I never have that experience. The death of a sibling is different.

Your relationship with them is unique. You share a common link with the past. How is *your* relationship with your siblings? How would their passing change your life?

Psychologists tell us it is normal to respond to the death of a sibling in certain ways. After the intense emotional reaction of a sibling come these reactions:

1. **Survival guilt is normal.** Why do you get to live and they are gone?
2. **Guilt of past relationship.** Your relationship was broken at the moment of death and you never attempted to fix it.
3. **Anger of a new role within the family.** You are suddenly responsible for your aging parents.
4. **Fears of morality.** How worried are you about your own death?

At the very heart of this morning's Gospel lesson is the death of a sibling. We find ourselves in the spiritual Gospel, John. The deceased is named Lazarus. He is the brother of Mary and Martha. You remember them. They were not just followers of Jesus, they were personal friends of Jesus. If anyone deserved a miracle, it was Mary and Martha. However, they didn't ask for a miracle because it was too late. Their brother was dead and he had been gone for four days. It was a common belief that even the spirit gave up on the corpse after three days. Lazarus is irrevocably dead and his sisters are grieving. They grieved for four days and attempted to face their new reality. How many new realities have you had to face? How many siblings have you lost to death?

This morning, I want to talk about three things you should do the next time you have to bury a loved one. The person may or may not be a sibling. However, I do believe these things really come into play when you lose a sibling. Let me give you the three things and then we will expound on each one. The first thing you have to do is remember. The second thing you have to do is review. The third and final thing you have to do is refocus. So if you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

Remember

On Tuesday, Lt. John Harold Pritchard of the British military was laid to rest. His family gathered to remember his life. It must have been hard for them to believe. After all, he died 96 years ago during World War I. Since 1917, his remains had been laying in a field in northern France. He was just one of the millions that were killed during the Great War. Today, his remains are resting in a cemetery that is filled with World War I veterans. His 86 year-old great nephew said it best, "We all feel better now because we know we can come and visit him. We now have a place to come and remember."

First, Mary and Martha must have remembered Lazarus' life. Prior to our reading, we were told Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. When Jesus finally arrived, it was too late. Lazarus was dead. Everyone was shocked by his death and many were crying. When Jesus saw their emotions, he was moved and began to

cry. (John 11:35) It is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it exposes a great deal about the Master. He wept because he was filled with compassion. He wept because he remembered better days with Lazarus. Have you ever wept at a funeral? I don't know how you can't be moved in some way when someone passes. It is important to remember. There is an old pagan belief that holds some truth. They believe that as long as the person is remembered, part of the person still remains. Is there someone you lost years ago who is still part of your life? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" The first thing you need to do at a funeral is remember. The second thing you need to do is review.

Review

In 1846, former president John Quincy Adams suffered a stroke. Although he returned to Congress the following year, his health was clearly failing. Daniel Webster described his last meeting with Adams: "Someone, a friend of his, came in and made particular inquiry of his health. Adams answered, 'I inhabit a weak, frail, decayed tenement; battered by the winds and broken in upon by the storms, and from all I can learn, the landlord does not intend to repair.'" It was too late for John Quincy Adams. It is not too late for you. I would recommend that you start living now!

Second, Mary and Martha must have reviewed their own lives at Lazarus' death. Are you happy with your life to this point? What changes do you need to make? The story of Lazarus teaches us of two things about life. First, it teaches us that life is unpredictable. No one expected him to die. Second, it teaches us that life is short. I once had a woman in her nineties tell me she was ready to sign up for ninety more years. Look at the story with me. The crowd was emotional as they gathered around Jesus. Lazarus was dead and life seemed unfair. The question at every funeral is, who is next? Death does not always happen in chronological order. Sometimes the young die. What do you still want to do with your life? Where do you still want to travel in this world? What do you still want to learn? I would suggest you don't wait. Life is unpredictable. Are you living? Or are you just waiting to die? Mark Twain once said, "*Let us endeavor so to live that when we come to die, even the undertaker will be sorry.*" If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" The first thing you need to do at a funeral is remember. The second thing you need to do is review. The third thing you need to do is refocus.

Refocus

This morning my daughter, Sarah, is preaching at the Hudson United Methodist Church. She is the Director of Christian Education for that congregation and this is Confirmation Sunday. I have really enjoyed helping her prepare her message and there is a part of me that wishes I was there. Her primary text is Mark 8:27-31, Peter's confession. You know the story. For some time the disciples had been following Jesus. They had experienced so much with the Master. They had seen the miracles. They had heard the teachings. They had felt his presence. They had experienced the reaction of the people

who constantly followed him. It is obvious to our generation that Jesus was the Messiah. However, to their generation, questions remained. Everyone knew Jesus was special and everyone hoped he was the Messiah. To clear all doubt, Jesus asks the twelve one question, who do you say I am? Any one of the disciples could have answered the question, but only voice was heard. Peter answered, "You are the Christ." That correct identification changed everything. That correct identification changed the way we look at death. This is the bottom line. Jesus is your only hope of salvation.

Every day in the newspaper names are listed in the obituaries. When was the last time you looked at the obituaries? When was the last time you didn't look at the obituaries? I will admit it. I look at the obituaries. Do you know what I have learned? I have learned death does not discriminate. It comes to every race. It happens to both genders. Age does not seem to matter to the grim reaper. It has been said, each one of us is terminal from birth. Each one of the obituaries is different. Sometimes, there is no photograph. Sometimes, there is a photograph. I like it when the family puts their 97 year-old grandmother's high school graduation picture in the paper. Sometimes, there are two photographs. One when the person was young; one when the person was not so young. The photographs that grab my attention are the ones of the couples. Beneath George and Helen's picture are the words, *Together Again*. Every time I read those words, I remember my parents. It comforts me that they are together again. I want to spend eternity with my spouse. Sometimes, when I look at those obituaries I think of my own. Have you have thought about your own obituary?

Have you have thought about your own death? Several years ago, someone asked me what I look forward to in my death. I always try to give an honest answer. I am no different from you. The positive about death is being reunited with all the people who have gone on ahead of me. Does that sound selfish? May be I should have said standing near the throne or singing in the choir. (However, when I get to heaven I am going to ask to be assigned to the non-musical section.) I couldn't care less about music, but I am passionate about people. I look forward to being with the people who loved me. Listen to what I am about to say. There is no hope of a great reunion without Jesus. Jesus asked the disciple, but Jesus is also asking you: Who do you say I am? I hope I identify him correctly. He must be your Lord and Savior! After all, he is your only hope of salvation.

Third and finally, Mary and Martha must have refocused. Death doesn't just challenge us to live fuller lives now. Death challenges us to be prepared for eternity. Does anyone here want to go to heaven? You aren't going to make it by your good works. You aren't going to make it because of your church membership. You aren't going to make it because you are a United Methodist. (The word Methodist isn't even found in the Bible.) Your only hope of salvation is Jesus. Look at the story with me. Mary and Martha were reunited with their deceased brother after death because of Jesus. Is it possible you are so busy with your life you need to refocus on eternity? Who is Jesus to you? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Can I be honest with you? Until this week, I have never thought about the death of my sisters. I work with people all the time, so I am qualified to make this next statement. My family is unique. We actually have a good relationship with each other. Susan and her family live in the Akron area. Janet and her family live in Colorado Springs. We both respect and enjoy one another. They are my older twin sisters by seven years. They have always been a part of my life. I don't know which of the three of us is going to die first. However, I do know it will be hard for the survivors.

Death brings out three things in us. First, death challenges us to **remember** the past. Those memories are important. Second, death challenges us to **review** your life to this moment. What do you still want to do? Third, death challenges us to **refocus** on eternity. Who is Jesus to you? Leonardo da Vinci once said, *"As a well-spent day brings happy sleep, so a life well used brings happy death."*

Will you please pray with me?