

“Resurrection Life”

John 11:21-27 & 33-45

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Prayer for Understanding God of grace, you promised never to break your covenant with us. Help us hear your eternal words of blessing, abundant life, and resurrection. Help us respond with courage to share your goodness and grace. Amen.

Jesus is saying to you. “I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?” **John 11:21-27 & 33-45 NLT**
“Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.” “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.” Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” When Jesus saw Mary weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within Jesus, and he was deeply troubled. “Where have you put him?” Jesus asked them. They told him, “Lord, come and see.” Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!” But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?” Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.” Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!” Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen.”

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Jesus is saying to you. “I am the bread of life.” Will you partake? “I am living water.” Will you drink?

Janet Mullaly wrote: “Do not let your heart be troubled. Be refreshed in Jesus. As the river of living water flows from God into your heart. You do not have to worry or be fearful anymore. Remember God is in control. Trust and believe, release your faith for as the living water flows.” The transforming grace of God flows in you.

Jesus wept. Jesus was greatly disturbed. Jesus wept for Lazarus. Jesus wept for the many ways death has entered God’s good creation spreading sin, pain, and despair. Jesus wept for every loss that you have experienced. Jesus wept out of frustration, his teachings are misunderstood, his miracles fail to inspire, few strive to truly follow him, we are unable to see the coming glory of resurrection. Jesus wept because Mary, Martha, and all of us are burdened by “ifs”. Jesus if you had been here. If only I. If only you. Jesus wept because we are often slogging in the loss, grief, sadness, and struggle of life instead of joyfully soaring with peace and love. Jesus wept because relationships are damaged by desires to be in control, to be right, to win, instead of listening and loving. Jesus wept for every instance someone chooses revenge over forgiveness. Jesus wept for the ways we wallow in guilt, instead of dancing with forgiving grace. Jesus wept for those with closed minds and hardened hearts. Jesus wept for all the ways that hate or fear or apathy tarnishes love. Jesus wept for the full range of death. Jesus weeps for each of us whenever we try to find resurrection in anything or anyone other than God, the resurrection and life.

Jesus wept because Martha said she believed and could not perceive how believing in resurrection life is transforming her daily life. She said, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world. I know that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” You can almost hear the, but what about me today, I am overwhelmed with grief. Then there is the, if only you would have been here wail. Another thought running through her mind is given voice by the crowd. “Could not Jesus who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this mad from dying?” Isn’t this a question many of us ask? I do. Why doesn’t our all powerful, all loving God create miraculous cures for little children and our loved ones who are dying? The answer has something to do with free will, something with seeing the bigger picture, something about how we are bound by time, something about physical death is a portal to perfect complete eternal life and perfect relationship with all and a lot of other stuff I have yet to discover and comprehend.

Do you apply Jesus’ words, “I am the resurrection and the life” only to Easter and funerals or do you believe they also apply to your personal daily life? Jesus is inviting you to believe that right now God is at work in you creating abundant life. Jesus invites you to believe God is powerful and is leading you away from every form of dying to joyful, complete life.

Belief in God is the foundation to the second step in 12-Step programs. Step 2 reads, “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” Do you believe that God is restoring you to life? Jesus proves he has the power to defeat every kind of death. Jesus brings abundant life today and eternal life. Yet our days are bombarded by deaths. 12step.org writes, “Step 2 is a step of hope, faith, and realization. It is a big step towards God. In spite of all of the failures in

my own life - all of the broken promises, hard feelings, disappointments, failures, destructive behavior, hatred, anxiety, depression, or guilt in my life - there is still hope. There is hope because there is a Power greater than me. And this Power has the ability to restore my life to a life where there is freedom from the insanity of addictive behaviors. I begin to realize that such a Power exists, and this Power is able to set me on the road to recovery and freedom.”

Step 2 flows from step 1 which states, “We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.” **Romans 3:23** states “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” All of us have some form of addiction perhaps work, food, sex, a dependent relationship, materialism, power, prestige, drugs or fill in your vice.

Our daily deaths are sometimes a spiral. It starts with pain then one reaches out for something, anything other than God, to ease the pain and bring temporary relief. The pain soother, idol, is hollow and brings negative consequences which brings shame, guilt, and more pain than the cycle repeats itself bringing more death.

Serenity gives this example. “The workaholic who has low self-esteem (pain) begins to overwork (addictive agent), which results in praise, success, and achievement (relief). However, as a rule, family relationships and his personal relationship with God suffer terribly because of preoccupation with work (negative consequences). The result is an even greater sense of shame and guilt because of inadequacies, both real and imagined, which brings them back to point one in the addiction cycle. The workaholic feels compelled to work even harder to overcome their guilt. The admission of powerlessness is the first step to recovery. Otherwise, they remain caught. If they rely on willpower alone, then the only thing they know to do is to escalate their addiction to get out of the pain. Step 1 calls us to do less - to yield, to surrender, to let go.”

When I was a sales manager, I was goal oriented. I won a myriad of awards for my performance. Pastor Michael asked me a very convicting question, “Who is in control? Is your faith in your ability to achieve your goals, objectives and plans or is it in God?”

There are an abundance of self-help books, shows, and seminars. Many of them are good and helpful and have helped people do wonderful things. Often God works through these tools to bring life. Sometimes they lead people astray giving them the impression that they are in control, that they have the power. The power is not positive thinking, affirmations, goals, planning, etc. The power is God. As long as you remember the first two steps. I am powerless. I am not in control. God is in control, all powerful and longs to restore us to life then many of these self-help programs are beneficial.

The Apostle Paul talked about a thorn, some addiction, a death, that he struggled with all his life. He admitted that he was not in control, that God is in control saying, **2 Corinthians 12:9 “I am content with my weakness; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. For God’s grace is sufficient for me, for God’s power is made perfect in weakness.”**

Jesus saw all of this pain, grasping for control and death and wept. Jesus sees how we need help and how we often look for help in a myriad of options instead of God. Jesus wept. Everyday Jesus showed he was the resurrection and life by healing, forgiving, mending, reuniting, teaching, loving. Jesus compared the life he brings to living bread, shining light, and living water. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead to prove again that God has power to transform every form of death into life. Jesus is a life giver.

Jesus’ question, “Do you believe?” is an invitation to welcome the power of God’s love so you can enjoy abundant life. How do you know if you believe if you have accepted the invitation of life? The answer rests in how well and how earnestly you have decided to turn over control of your life to God. In the 12-Step programs this is Step 3 “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.”

In the movie *Bridge to Terabithia*, Jess is a junior high boy that is surrounded by death. He is bullied. His family is poor. His older sisters tease him. He perceives that his father only values him for his work and not as a person. All of these deaths are tearing him apart, depressing him, making him bitter and causing him to emotionally die. His friend shows him how to open his mind; how to stop blocking God from entering his life. It is a faith progression. Jess is a gifted artist and finds life in the beauty of his art. He discovers life in the joy of singing. He discovers life as he realizes loving thoughts are more powerful than dark thoughts, fears, and pains. He uncovers life as he sees the pain in others that is being transferred to him and begins to be able to look past their transference to their love for him that is buried underneath. As his mind opens more to God, he laughs again and discovers abundant life. His friend dies. For awhile he reverts to death. He is angry, destroys his drawings, dark thoughts run wild in his mind, he blames his friend for dying, he yells and pushes his youngest sister to the ground. Then he remembered the life, the special gift, his friend gave him; how she invited him to open his mind letting the life of God nourish his life. After a few days Jess shows his youngest sister how much he loves her by taking her to a special place where he and his friend previously played. There, Jess gives his sister that same special gift—an open mind to God’s resurrection life. The movie ends with them both finding resurrection life.

Having an open mind is trusting God to restore us to life, believing Jesus is the resurrection and the life. An open mind lets go so one can let God come. God is inviting you to have the courage to give God control of your life, to receive transforming grace that nourishes your hunger with the bread of life, quenches your thirst with living water and resurrections every form of death to abundant eternal life. Amen