

“God Gives Life”

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Pastor James York

April 6, 2014

John 11:25-26a NRSV “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”

Growing up this scripture confused me. It contradicts itself. You will die. You will live. You will never die. What are you talking about Jesus? You just said in the same sentence that we will die. I saw plenty of believers in Jesus die. Perhaps it would have helped my understanding if Pastor Everhard would have sometimes read a different translation. **John 11:25-26a NLT “Jesus told her, I am the Resurrection and the Life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish.”** The message paraphrases it **John 11:25-26a “You don’t have to wait for the End. I am right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all.”**

After I read the entire Bible, I perceived a deeper understanding of this scripture. Our physical body which is mere dust, described in scripture as a tent, a temporary shelter for our soul, dirt, a seed, a cracked clay jar, feeble deteriorating flesh will die. At that moment our soul, or spirit, is set free of our restrictive, hindering dirt physical body. Our soul lives forever. Our soul will never die. Our soul will shed our physical body which dies, so it can receive our perfect, glorious resurrection body. An extremely crude illustration of this is a caterpillar crawling around in the dirt, and then it sheds the cocoon and becomes a butterfly.

Another facet of this scripture is on earth we get to choose how we will live. We can choose to love, to hope, to trust, and believe in the power of God who gives life or we can choose to hate, to complain, to be cynical, skeptical, and suspicious. Regardless of your choices by God’s grace our soul will live forever.

All of our scriptures today are on resurrection. They do not seek to capture our imagination rather to set our imagination free. They do not seek to merely fulfill our dreams rather to dream grandeur and trust that all of that and much more will become reality. We are invited to imagine and dream how God gives life.

It all began when the breath of God gave life. God breathed upon the dust and humanity was given life. God’s breath flows into the cosmos always creating, sustaining and giving life. From the beginning of time through eternity God gives life.

The prophet Ezekiel tells of one facet of God giving life. **Ezekiel 37:1-2 “The hand of the LORD came upon me, and God brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. God led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.”**

These dry bones symbolize us when we are hopeless, when we lose all energy, when we become so distraught we are unrecognizable, when we fall apart, when every ounce of life that we can muster fails and all that remains is a scattered pile of our dry bones. It symbolizes the way we suck life out of ourselves with our sin, our selfishness or desire to be in control and live

without God. It symbolizes those days when we do not want to get out of bed, those times when despite our best efforts we are making no progress. We all know dry, scattered times.

Ezekiel continues. **Ezekiel 37:3** “**God said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."**” Ezekiel has set his imagination free, he is dreaming extravagantly. God you know resurrection. God you have power to renew, to bring life to the dead, to take dreams on life support and fulfill them, making us and our dreams soar. God you have the power to give life.

Ezekiel 37:4-14 “**Then God said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."** So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then God said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then God said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

God gives life to whatever is dusty, dry, and dead within us. God gives life to us as individuals, our communities, and the entire cosmos. God gives life to your hope. Evil dies. The dust that is our flesh will return to dust; however, our soul lives forever. God's breath will give our souls a new glorious eternal resurrection body.

We are invited to live into our belief of our life giving and our life resurrecting God. It is trusting hope is stronger than despair, pain will be followed by comfort, sadness will be swallowed by joy, hate is erased with love, brokenness will be made whole, complete, discord will be banished by peace, fear is trumped by love, winter will give way to spring, grief will end in reunion. Death is a journey of shedding our restrictive shell, our body, so we can shine with abundant life.

We are invited to imagine, to dream, to set our mind on the ways God gives life. The Apostle Paul wrote. **Romans 8:6-11** “**To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, God who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through God's Spirit that dwells in you.**

God always brings life. The gospel of John proclaims. **John 11:1-35** "Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, Jesus stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Jesus, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, Jesus told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 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. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. Jesus said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep.

Jesus wept. Jesus tears are also God the creator and the Holy Spirit's tear. Our Triune God wept. Wept is a weak translation. Jesus shuttered with sadness. Every fiber of Jesus being shook with emotion. This word is used only one other place in the Bible when Jesus wept in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus took upon himself all the sins of the world. Here Jesus takes on every tear that was, is, and will be shed. Jesus took on your grief with so much compassion that it is as real to Jesus as it is to you. Jesus taking on our grief caused him to shudder with sadness, to be greatly disturbed in spirit, to burst forth in tears. Jesus wept because he realizes we

have a hard time seeing beyond the grave, our imagination is feeble, our dreams are small. Jesus wept because we cannot comprehend resurrection or how God gives life.

John 11:35-45 “Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how Jesus loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When Jesus had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.”

Jesus calls us to come out of our caves; come out of the stench our sin, fear, and hate creates; come out of the grave of our sadness and grief. Jesus calls us by name. Jesus’ light disperses our darkness. Jesus calls us out of disaster. Jesus rolls away our barriers. Jesus unbinds us and sets us free. Jesus said, “Woman take a drink of living water.” Jesus said, “Little girl rise up.” Jesus said, “Open your eyes.” Jesus said, “Get up and walk.” Jesus said, “I do not condemn you; today you will be with me in paradise.” Jesus speaks to us whenever our hope fades, words that give life, that shine light, that renew, that resurrect.

Brett Younger wrote. “There is no death, really. There is only life. Death is not the way it appears from this side. Death is not an abyss into which we go into chaos. Death is, rather, a portal through which we move into everlasting life. The one that meets us there is the same generosity that gave us our lives in the beginning, the one who gave us our birth. Not because we deserved it but because that generous one wanted us to be and therefore there is nothing to fear. The grave is as empty as a doorway is empty. Our greatest agenda is to learn to accept, to learn to trust. We are put here to learn to love more fully. There is only life. Christ is where death ends and life begins. God gives life on both sides of the grave.”

The resurrected Jesus breathed life on the disciples and they shared God’s life. Today and every day the Holy Spirit is breathing life into us.

This communion table is much bigger than it looks, it goes around the world with a life giving spot prepared by God for every person, and it goes into heaven with a life giving spot prepared for every person by God since the beginning of time through the end of time. At this table we are encouraged to hand over our burdens to God, to receive the bread of eternal life and the living juice. We are invited to let our imagination free and dream extravagantly. We are nourished with life to sustain our soul through the dark, dusty, dry, valleys, through the death of our physical shell, to our home in heaven where we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. God gives life. Amen.