

"I AM the Resurrection and the Life"

John 11:20-46, Sexagesima Sunday

February 3, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....Today in the Nicene Creed we confessed Jesus "suffered, died, and was buried, and the third day He rose again." We also confessed "I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." There are in the Bible two kinds of resurrection. When God quickens and converts us to faith, this is our FIRST resurrection. We were spiritually dead in trespasses and sin, but Christ the Word quickens us so we have spiritual life by faith. This faith comes by Baptism or Gospel preaching. Jesus declares, "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." The SECOND resurrection is the Last Day, or Judgment Day. Jesus said, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." All those souls in heaven right now, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the thief on the cross, the penitent adulterer, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.....all the saints above will reunite with their bodies, and the "dead in Christ shall rise first." All this is possible because of the glorious and first resurrection of Christ. Therefore, as the Bible says, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

From the Scriptures we know Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were very close siblings who loved one another. Certainly they had heard Jesus preach on many occasions, and Jesus was their true friend. Earlier in the chapter we learn Lazarus had become deathly sick, and though the sisters sent for Jesus, Jesus did not come and heal. In this life we don't always recover from every sickness. Sometimes our sickness brings death. Both sickness and death prove the simple fact that all men are sinners, and the Bible says "the wages of sin is death." Sin makes us mortal and not immortal, and even from our infancy our bodies prove to be very weak and fragile. Temporal death is our just punishment for sin. Our bodies simply have to die for all the evil they have done. Even Christians who are truly forgiven of all sin still die and return to dust. Isaiah writes, "But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." When we break down with age and living becomes rather miserable, all believers should easily be able to say "This is what I deserve for my sin". We should not despair however because Jesus is our Friend. When we are sick we should pray as Mary and Martha, and usually Christ will heal.

Even if the Lord doesn't heal us and we die as Lazarus, to die in the faith of Christ is to pass from death to life. In John 5:24 Jesus promises, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

While the suffering and death of Lazarus had to be devastating for Mary and Martha, they were yet believers who trusted in Christ. Their grief was deep, but they didn't despair. Martha appears to be the stronger one here, for she immediately goes to see Jesus when He is near saying, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know that even now whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She does not resent Christ here, nor is she angry with Him, but she really struggles with the question, "Why didn't you come?" We have the same problem today when God doesn't answer all our prayers with a YES. We forget God may have something better in store for us. As for the question, *Did Martha believe Jesus might then and there raise Lazarus from the dead?....*this seems unlikely, for when Jesus said, "Thy brother shall rise again", she considers only the Resurrection on the Last Day when Christ comes to judge the quick and the dead. Also Jesus adds, "I AM THE RESURRECTION and the life: he that believeth in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

Jesus could ask this same question of us today....Do we believe Jesus when He says He is THE RESURRECTION and our LIFE or do we deny His resurrection and our life? Is His Word true or not? "For if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins." There is then a logical sequence to it all. To deny the physical resurrection of Christ, is to deny His blood bought atonement for our sins on the cross. If there is no atonement, there is no forgiveness for our sins. To not believe in the glorious resurrection of Christ then is to bring all our sins back upon ourselves, like a millstone hanging about our neck. Deniers of the resurrection cast themselves back into the sea of damnation even though Christ "died for all". God has no choice but to judge such deniers for their evil works on the Last Day, the Day of Resurrection. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

While all this is true, Jesus doesn't want us to believe He is our Resurrection and Life because we are afraid of hell. God forbid! He came to deliver us from death and hell and this is why He so emphatically states, "I AM THE RESURRECTION and the life: he that believeth in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." While we all at times suffer from sickness, a very small consequence to our sin, Christ heaped upon Himself ALL the sickness of the entire world, namely the sins of the ENTIRE WORLD, ALL SINNERS. Our sins were heaped upon His poor and bloodied back, and He even received all our sins into His own body, so that He and not we would be punished with

hell upon that cross. This is why we call Jesus both the Sacrifice and also the Priest. As the Lamb of God He was the sacrifice, and in His willingness to offer up Himself Jesus was the Priest. This is why we need no pastor or priest on earth to mediate for us. Hebrews 7:26 & 27 says, "For such an high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." His resurrection then on the third day is God's glorious stamp or seal of approval. It is God's declaration to all sinners that the debt of all has been paid for, not with gold or silver, but with Jesus' holy and precious blood. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." In His resurrection we too rise from unbelief by faith in Him. His conquering of death becomes our conquering of death, and to die in the Lord is to pass from death to eternal life.

If we remember this, especially when we are sick and dying, we will not despair. Let us now consider Mary who came later in our lesson to see Jesus. It appears the grief of Mary was more severe than Martha. She is more emotional and she cannot help but throw herself at Jesus feet. "Lord if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Her words came from a soul that had been deeply wounded by the horror of death. She was shaking and trembling in faith on the brink of despair. "Why didn't you come Lord?" Similarly when our trial of faith is most severe, it does sometimes bring us to the very brink so we feel as if God really has forsaken us. When your trial in life is most severe dear Christian, you must learn to toss all your reason and senses out the door. They will not help you in this trial. Instead think of Jesus, think of the Word which says "Peace, be still" and "Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid." While God may for a moment allow you to feel forsaken, it is only so your faith will cling more tightly to Christ the living Word who promises "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of *my* hands; thy walls *are* continually before me." How can God forget you? How can God forsake you? God need only look upon His hands and feet to be reminded. Do not then forsake Him, but cling to Him all the more, for He is not a God who is untouched or unmoved by your sorrows, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin."

This is why Christ groaned in the spirit and also why "Jesus wept." His groaning was actually an outward manifestation of internal impatience and anger. With true compassion, as our great High Priest, Jesus now stood at the grave on the side of fallen mankind subject to death. This death pained Him, and our desperate plight hurt His heart. His holy anger now burned against our archenemy the devil, who caused the death of Lazarus and all others. At this gravesite Christ now shows Himself as our True Brother of

flesh and blood, bringing Himself into our struggles with death. He would now fight to deliver us from death with all his heart, as he would soon suffer and die Himself for our sins upon the cross. His tears now were true and holy tears of compassion and mercy upon us sinners subject to death. Even today when we cry at a funeral, when death takes husband or wife, son or daughter, mother or father, Jesus sanctifies these tears. It is not a sin to cry when a believer dies, even though we know they go straight to heaven. Nor is it a sin to cry when a loved one who is an unbeliever dies, for we know what they lost and we know what they will never know, that peace which surpasses all understanding. Thanks be to God there is a "place reserved for us in heaven" and your names are written in heaven.

Finally now in the end imprint this last picture upon your heart. Christ the Prince of life, stands before a tomb where the body is a prisoner to death. Christ the Living Word cries out "Lazarus come forth!" and the dead rises to life. What more needs to be said? Life now surges through that dead body of Lazarus. The heart again beats, living blood courses through His veins. He that was dead now lives. POOR Lazarus! For four days His soul enjoyed the bliss of Christ in heaven, and now Christ calls Him back to this vale of tears! Yet this is for God's glory, and for the eternal comfort of Mary and Martha and all true believers. You will see your loved ones again dear believer, if only you believe. This is also why you should commune today, for God by these Means of Grace will strengthen and preserve your faith. In conclusion.....when it comes to forgiveness of sins, Christ, heaven, and salvation, cast all your reason and fears away, for Christ by His death gave you true and everlasting life. Believe only in His resurrection, and life everlasting will one day also course through your veins in those mansions above. "Fear not only believe". "I am the resurrection, and the life."

Where is Lazarus now? Where is Mary and Martha? Where are the saints if not above? Where will you be if only you believe? "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also." Amen.