2024 Easter Sunday Message

**“IF YOU BELIEVE, YOU WILL SEE THE GLORY OF GOD”**

*(Subtitle: Breaking Free from the Tomb)*

John 11:25-44

Key Verse: 11:40

“Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’”

 “Happy Easter!” “Christ is Risen!” As we celebrate Jesus rising from the dead, I invite you to join me in exploring a story that embodies the heart of Easter – the resurrection of Lazarus. In John chapter 11, we encounter a powerful narrative beyond a simple tale of physical resurrection. It speaks to the transformative power of faith. As we reflect on today’s passage, let’s grasp the true meaning of Easter. It’s not merely a historical event to commemorate it; it’s an invitation to experience the resurrection power of Jesus in our lives today.

 I want to share the story of a young man who was just eighteen. This young man experienced a devastating rejection from a long-time friend, who cruelly labeled him as the *“ugliest”* person she had ever met. (Pic#1) This rejection shattered his self-worth, plunging him into a tomb of shame. Despite his outward appearance of strength, internally, he battled with feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, and loneliness. In the aftermath of this painful encounter, the young man was trapped in the cycle of negative thoughts, drowning in the suffocating darkness of shame.

Perhaps some of you can relate to the struggles of this young man. You might have experienced rejection or betrayal, leaving you feeling shattered and ashamed. You’ve been carrying the burden of past mistakes and failures, convinced you are unworthy of love and acceptance. Today, let’s journey together and discover how the resurrection power of Jesus can bring new life, hope, and healing to every area of our lives.

In John 11:1-16, Jesus received news that his dear friend Lazarus was gravely ill. Despite this, he informed his disciples that Lazarus’s illness would not end in death but would serve as an occasion for God’s glory to be revealed. His disciples were perplexed by Jesus’ delay and expressed concern about returning to Judea, where there were threats against Jesus’ life. Jesus reassured them that he was acting by God’s timing, urging them to remain faithful and walk in the light while it was still available.

Moving to verses 17-24, we find Jesus arriving in Bethany four days after Lazarus had passed away. Upon meeting Jesus, Lazarus’s sister Martha expressed her grief, lamenting that if Jesus had arrived earlier, her brother would still be alive. Despite her sorrow, Martha maintained her belief that God would help Jesus. Jesus comforted Martha, saying Lazarus would rise again. But she did not understand what Jesus meant. It prompted Martha to say in verse 24, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Look at verses 25 and 26. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” The words Jesus speaks to Martha carry profound meaning, summarizing essential truths about his identity and the promise of eternal life. Let’s break down the significance of Jesus’ words.

 When Jesus proclaimed himself as *“the resurrection and the life” (25a),* he was declaring his divine authority and power over life and death. He isn’t merely a wise teacher or a worker of miracles but the very source and embodiment of resurrection and life itself. This statement emphasizes that Jesus holds the ultimate authority over eternal life and possesses the power to set us free from the grip of death.

 *“The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” (25b-26a)* This statement highlights the **twofold nature of eternal life** offered by Jesus to believers. It underscores the assurance that through faith in Jesus, believers are guaranteed physical resurrection after death. While believers may experience physical death, their faith guarantees that they will ultimately be raised to new life in Christ. This promise of resurrection instills hope and confidence in believers as they confront death. Moreover, believers can experience the resurrection life through faith in Jesus Christ, the source of life, while living in the world here and now.

 When Jesus asked Martha, *“Do you believe this?” (26b),* he was challenging and inviting her to trust him as the resurrection and life, regardless of her circumstances. It highlights the importance of faith in him. “Do you believe this?”

When Jesus asked Martha whether she believed in him as the resurrection and the life, he invited her to exercise faith in him. This faith includes a confident assurance in the promise of God, even when those promises were not yet fully realized or visible to the human eyes. This echoes the essence of faith as described in Hebrews 11:1, which states, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

Jesus’ question, “*Do you believe this?”* serves as a reminder that true faith does not depend upon visible evidence or favorable circumstances. But it’s grounded in deep confidence in God’s unfailing love and faithfulness. It’s an invitation to believe in him wholeheartedly, acknowledging that he is faithful in fulfilling his promise and bringing about his ultimate purposes in our lives. Faith is the answer.

 How did Martha respond to Jesus’ invitation? Look at verse 27. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied. ‘I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’” We see that Martha recognized Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God, who can bring salvation and the presence of God’s rule on earth. It was remarkable that despite her grief and confusion surrounding her brother’s death, her faith in Jesus remained steadfast. However, while she articulated a correct theological understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, her comprehension might not have fully embraced the depth of what she confessed.

 In verses 28-43, we see Jesus’ remarkable display of Jesus’ power as he commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb. This miraculous event validated Jesus’ claim to be the resurrection and the life.

 In verses 28-37, Jesus met Mary, Martha’s sister, and those who came to comfort the family of Lazarus. Look at verses 28-32. “After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside, ‘The Teacher is here,’ she said, ‘and is asking for you.’ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now, Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’” Mary’s response to Jesus mirrored that of her sister Martha, expressing a similar sentiment of disappointment and grief over the death of their beloved brother Lazarus. Given his close relationship with them and his reputation for performing miracles, Martha and Mary had expected Jesus to intervene and prevent their beloved brother’s death.

This situation reflects a common experience for believers facing trials and challenges. We often have certain expectations of how God will act or intervene in our lives based on our understanding of his character and promises. We may experience disappointment, doubt, or confusion when these expectations are unmet.

Look at verses 33-25. “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus swept.” Jesus’ response to the grief and sorrow of Martha and Mary was compassionate and empathetic. Someone said the shortest and most moving Bible verse is verse 35, “Jesus wept.” During one of the first summer conferences I attended in Korea, one brother who lost his father at a young age attended the conference and was deeply touched by this one word, “Jesus wept.” (Pic#2) Jesus wept with Martha, Mary, and other friends, sharing their sorrow and validating their pain. (Pic#3) This demonstrates Jesus’ genuine humanity, understanding of the human experience, and willingness to meet us in our moments of disappointment and despair. Even in moments of darkness and uncertainty, we can find comfort in knowing that Jesus is always with us, ready to offer us hope, healing, and restoration.

Look at verses 38-39. “Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘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.’” In these verses, we witness Jesus’ deep emotional response as he approached the tomb of Lazarus. Despite knowing that he was about to perform a miraculous act of resurrection, Jesus was still moved by the sight of the tomb and the reality of death.

When Jesus instructed the people to remove the stone, Lazarus’s sister, Martha, hesitated. She interjected, pointing out the practical reality of the situation. *“No, my Lord, Lazarus had been dead for four days, and the stench of decay will be overwhelming.”* To her, death was the end of everything, and she was too scared to confront it. The death of her brother was a painful tragedy and traumatic. So, she hesitated to follow Jesus’ instruction, “Take away the stone.” Like Martha, we may also allow our hearts to harden with unbelief, doubting God’s ability to work in our lives in extraordinary ways.

How did Jesus respond to Martha? Read verses 40 and 41a. “Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’ So, they took away the stone.” Jesus’s response to Martha’s hesitation was instructive. He gently reminded her of the greater reality – that if she believes, she will see the glory of God. Jesus challenged Martha to move beyond her doubts and fears to trust in his power and authority and to remove the stone of unbelief from her heart.

Ultimately, this passage challenges us to examine our hearts and to trust in God’s leading, even when it seems impossible. It reminds us that our circumstances do not limit God’s power and that he can radically transform our lives if we have faith and trust in him. For this transformation to happen, we should first open our hearts and confront our past failures, shame, pains, guilt, fear, doubt, resentment, etc. Whatever is hidden deep inside of us should be exposed to the light of Jesus. It’s a challenging process of faith in Jesus Christ that we should take one step at a time. (RFDH: Revealing, Feeling, Dealing, Healing) Some believers who say they are born again remain unchanged because they bury their problems in the tomb. We need to go deep inside. Someone said, *“Christ lives in our hearts, but Grandpa lives in our bones*.” We must engage in personal anthropology, seeking God’s healing from our root causes.

Seeing the glory of God does not mean achieving worldly success or recognition. It means becoming more like Christ – growing in holiness, compassion, and obedience to God’s will. This transformation is a work of the Holy Spirit within us as we yield ourselves to his leading and allow him to shape us into the image of Christ. It reminds us of what St. Irenaeus beautifully described in saying, *“The glory of God is a man (human) fully alive.”* Jesus also said to his disciples, “The thief comes to only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” (Jn. 10:1)

In verses 41-42, Jesus offers a prayer of thanksgiving to God the Father before performing the miraculous resurrection of Lazarus. He acknowledged God’s power and authority, expressing gratitude that God always hears him. Then, with a loud voice, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb.

Look at verses 43-44. “When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ 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.’”

 In reflecting on the resurrection of Lazarus, we discover profound truths about experiencing the power of Jesus’ resurrection in our lives. Although we may not be physically dead like Lazarus, we can relate to his state of helplessness and hopelessness, feeling trapped in the grip of the power of death. Yet, this event reveals that death holds no control over us when we place our trust in Jesus as the source of resurrection and life.

 As children of God, we are meant to experience a fresh and new life through Christ Jesus. If we find ourselves stagnant, with hearts resembling tombs permeated by the smell of death, it’s a sign that something is blocking the transformative power of Jesus in our lives. We may be carrying deep wounds from past traumas, harboring shame, resentment, or guilt, or succumbing to self-pity or hardness of heart to avoid further pain. We need to open our minds and hearts to Jesus. By opening ourselves, our shame, pain, and grief, to Christ Jesus, his transformative power works in us, renewing and restoring us from the inside out. “And whoever lives by believing in e will never die. Do you believe this?” May our answer be a resounding ***“Yes!!!”*** as we embrace the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

 As we conclude our reflection on your word, we are grateful for the truths revealed to us through the story of Lazarus’ resurrection. We thank You for the powerful reminder that You are the resurrection and the life and that through faith in You, we have eternal life, Now and forever. Help us, Lord, to live each day with unwavering faith, knowing that you are with us in every trial and triumph. Strengthen us to trust in your timing and your purposes, even when we cannot see the way forward. We lift to you any who are facing situations that seem hopeless or impossible. May they find encouragement and renewed faith in the promise of resurrection and the assurance of your presence. Empower us to be witnesses of your grace and bearers of your light wherever we go. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.