

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

AND THE LIFE

Perhaps you can only really understand "life" in light of death. That's what happened to Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. You read about it in John 11, where Jesus attends the funeral of His friend.

Jesus got the news that Lazarus was sick, but waited until he died. Why? Verse 4, "***This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so the Son of God may be glorified through it.***" Jesus tarried because He loved these friends. Love is not sentimental feelings, it is a matter of mind and will as well as heart. Jesus desires the best "good" for those He loves - and sometimes this means things we consider "bad" must take place. That's so God's perfect plan comes to pass.

When they left for the funeral, Jesus said in verse 15 it was "***so that you may believe.***" His disciples thought they were going to their own death, since the authorities were on the lookout for Jesus. For Jesus, it was all a matter of timing, in the providence of God. That's what He meant in verse 9 when He told his disciples they must work in the day, while they had the light of the world. Then He proceeded to teach them great lessons about life, death, and resurrection.

DEATH - in verse 11, Jesus said, "***Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.***" This is similar to the little girl He raised in Mark 5. And it's how 1 Thessalonians 4:13 describes the death of believers. The Old Testament phrase was "*slept with his fathers.*" Real life does not end with death.

Martha ran to meet Jesus as He arrived at Bethany. "***Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You.***" Was this an affirmation or an accusation? We often respond, "*why did God let this happen?*" Understandable, but not commendable. Faith does not accuse God. Our "whys" are answered in the Who, as we trust God. Martha meant, "*even though my brother died, Lord, I still trust You.*"

RESURRECTION - Then Jesus said, "***Your brother will rise again.***" Martha's theology kicked in. Not a bad thing when you're numb with grief. She said, "***I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.***" Note well this distinction: everyone will be raised in resurrection, but only believers in Jesus will live with God forever. Unbelievers will rise to face judgment and endure eternal justice without God. Martha's words "***I know that he will rise***" shows that Lazarus truly was a believer in Christ, trusting in Jesus and His words in John 5:21-29 and John 6:40. His family knew he had saving faith in Jesus.

But here Jesus wasn't teaching theology, He was making a proclamation. He meant today, not the last day. Verse 25, "***I AM the Resurrection and the Life.***" This was another divine declaration of the deity and glory of the Son of God. He doesn't just teach about resurrection. He isn't just its agent or cause. He IS the resurrection. He is "I AM" - God, lord of life, creator, redeemer, re-generator. Jesus is the One who raises the dead to life, both spiritually (*re-birth by the Holy Spirit*) and physically (*resurrection*).

LIFE - Jesus continues in verse 26, "***whoever believes in Me though he die yet shall he live.***" We often hear these words at funerals and get confused. That's because we tend to think of earthly existence as "life" when actually "death" is merely the end of earthly existence. We tend to focus on the death of our body. But the real you is not a body but a soul - an eternal soul living in an earthly body. The real you, your soul, will continue to live after the death of your earthly body.

The question is, will you live in heaven or hell? What Jesus teaches here echoes John 3:36 "***whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him forever.***" If you're facing death, you'd better be sure about Jesus! And that's where Jesus takes His conversation with Martha. "***Do you believe this?***" Jesus asks her.

In the midst of her grief and trial, Martha's response is one of the clearest statements of saving faith in Scripture. "***Yes, Lord, I believe,***" she says, "***that You are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world.***" This is a very Jewish and very Christian way of speaking. Because Jesus is Messiah, the promised One we welcome at Christmastime. And this echoes John 1:9-12 - that Jesus is the true light coming into the world, and all who receive Him, who believe in His name, become children of God, who are reborn from above by the Holy Spirit. *May this be true of YOU today!*