

SERMON NOTES

John 11:1-44

“Jesus Is Our Life”

Intro:

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in our nation's service.

While Waterloo N.Y. was officially declared the birthplace of Memorial Day by President Lyndon Johnson in May 1966, it's difficult to prove conclusively the origins of the day. It is more likely that it had many separate beginnings in the 1860's of people gathering to honor the soldiers and sailors who died during the Civil War.

A growing movement to honor the war dead culminated in Gen John Logan giving his official proclamation May 5, 1868, and Memorial Day was first observed May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery.

The first state to officially recognize the holiday was New York in 1873. By 1890 it was recognized by all of the northern states. The South refused to acknowledge the day, honoring their dead on separate days until after World War I (when the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to honoring Americans who died fighting in any war). Since 1971, Memorial Day has been celebrated on the last Monday in May to ensure a three day weekend for Federal holidays

For many people, Memorial Day is not only a day to remember our veterans and war dead, but also to visit graves and remember all loved ones who have died.

Several years ago I was watching a TV show in which a teenager was making a pain of himself by asking questions about the meaning of life in light of the fact of death - *Abnormal@ questions that nobody wanted to think about* - in the midst of a rather inane TV show suddenly came this gem of a line from this teenager: *AThe stuff we say is important is but a distraction from the real stuff, but the real stuff is too scary to face.@*

- Education / Sports / Career Success / Material Possessions / Physical Fitness & Health / Financial Security / Retirement – *that's the stuff we say is important – yet is actually a distraction from the real stuff*

- *The meaning of life // the certainty of death // life after death // the unseen and spiritual and eternal // heaven & hell – that is the real stuff – too scary to face for most people*

Hopelessly confused, and terrified of the unknown, many people just ignore the elephant in the room, and never talk about death, and try to occupy their minds with stuff we say is important but is actually just a distraction from the real stuff

-hoping that if they don=t think about it and don=t talk about it, then maybe it won=t happen to them

-or hoping that they will have plenty of warning and plenty of time later to prepare for death

-yet death often comes quickly and suddenly and unexpectedly and without adequate warning and preparation time

It seems like the only time it is OK to think or talk about death is when we=re making life insurance policy decisions

-yet even then, we avoid the real stuff

*-for the most important question is not: **If you were to die today, would your family have enough money tomorrow?@***

*-rather, the most important question is: **If you were to die today, would you spend eternity in heaven or in hell, and how do you know for sure, and does your family know?@***

I am told that an Indiana cemetery has a tombstone (more than a hundred years old) which bears the following epitaph:

*Pause Stranger, when you pass me by,
As you are now, so once was I
As I am now, so you will be,
So prepare for death and follow me.*

An unknown passerby read those words and underneath scratched this reply:

*To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went.*

How about you?

-Are you prepared for death?

-Do you know which way you=re going when your time comes?

-Or are you distracting yourself with trivial pursuits such as money and sex and sports and business and pleasure because the real stuff is too scary to face?

I. CONFRONTING THE REALITY OF DEATH

When Mary and Martha of Bethany got smacked in the face with the real stuff, they sent word to Jesus: *ALord, the one you love is sick.*@

-their brother Lazarus was seriously ill, and they knew that only Jesus could heal him of his sickness

-it was well known that Jesus loved Lazarus, Martha & Mary as his special friends

-so, of course, Jesus would come immediately and restore Lazarus to good health

Mary & Martha waited. And Lazarus grew worse. And Jesus did not come.

-And then Lazarus died. And then Lazarus was buried. Still no sign of Jesus.

Martha and Mary could not believe that Jesus had failed to come during their hour of need.

-Surely the One who had opened the eyes of the blind could have kept their brother from dying!

-Why, then, when they sent word to Jesus of Lazarus= sickness, why didn=t Jesus come?

-If only Jesus had been there, everything would have been different

-If only Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died

Martha and Mary were crushed. They thought they knew Jesus. They thought they could count on Jesus. Jesus had never let them down before.

--Why now? Why now with their brother=s life at stake?

How did Jesus respond when he heard the news of Lazarus= illness?

John 11:5 - 6 (NIV) ⁵Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Jesus loved his friends, but he did not respond when or how they desired and expected

-Jesus was following his own agenda, his own timetable, for his own purposes

-That is how it is when you are friends with Jesus

-He loves us, BUT ... He is not controlled by our expectations / rather He is governed by the Father=s will

Have you learned yet that the Lord acts in accordance with his own sense of timing and purpose?

--Have you learned yet that the sense of urgency you feel is not necessarily the same as His timing?

Sometimes our impatience is not even selfish – *it's not just that I want what I want when I want it* – I mean, Lazarus really was sick to the point of dying – there was no time to lose to save his life – *sometimes we are involved in a situation that really is critical – and we are beseeching God to act not for our own selfish desires – but because someone else desperately needs God's help and intervention*

Jesus proceeds with his own sense of timing – sometimes seemingly indifferent toward the urgency of our plight

--But He has His own purposes in His own timing

By the time Jesus finally arrived in Bethany – after delaying two days -- Lazarus had already been in the tomb for 4 days

--Lazarus apparently died before Jesus could have arrived even if he had left right away

--yet as far as Jesus was concerned, the situation was well under control

-Jesus does not panic in the face of death – or any other seemingly hopeless situation

-Jesus knew that no harm would come to Lazarus by dying / and great good would come to the disciples by seeing Jesus= glory in a new way

Jesus was about to reveal that he was more than a great healer

-Jesus was about to reveal that ultimately, no harm can befall the one who trusts in Jesus - indeed, even death itself cannot harm the one who believes in Jesus

--this is why Jesus does not hesitate to call us to lay down our lives for the Gospel – because not even death can harm the one who entrusts his life to Jesus

Did you catch that? **Jesus knew that no harm would come to Lazarus by dying**

--That is Jesus' perspective on life and death and life after death

--Jesus understands that death does NOT reign over those who belong to him

You see, there can be no true security in life / no freedom from fear / and no certain hope for the future -- until the problem of death is resolved

-for if death rules over life / if all of our most cherished relationships, achievements, pleasures and possessions are just a heart-beat away from tragic loss, permanent separation, and total nothingness...

- then insecurity, fear, meaninglessness and despair are the ultimate realities and outcomes of human existence

-hope is merely a sentimental by-product of wishful thinking if death rules

--a thought too scary for most people to face

When Martha heard that Jesus was finally coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home

-I think that Mary was still too hurt to see Jesus

When Martha met Jesus, she spoke from her heart - a heart with mixed feelings of anger and faith

John 11:21 - 22 (NIV) ²¹“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

AWhat if@ questions can be so painful to deal with at the time of the death of a loved one

-@If only the doctor had...@ / @If only the hospital had...@ / @If only I had...@

AIf only Jesus had been here...”

-Yet no sooner are Martha=s words of reproach out than there follow the words of faith:

AEven now - even now - I know that God will give you whatever you ask.@

Jesus accepted Martha=s anger / and he responded to her faith:

John 11:23 (NIV) ²³Jesus said to her, **“Your brother will rise again.”**

Her rabbi and religious friends had probably tried to comfort her with similar words

-You know the kind of things well-meaning people say at visitations and funerals:

-@At least her suffering is over now.@

-@She=s in a much better place now.@

-@At least he died peacefully.@

Martha responded to Jesus as if reciting her catechism:

John 11:24 (NIV) ²⁴Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

The dominant sect of Judaism in that day, the Pharisees, believed in the resurrection of the dead at the last day.

--But for Jews at that time, belief in the life to come was little more than a leap of faith.

--Indeed, the Sadducees did not believe in any afterlife.

For Martha, belief in eternal life was little more than an article of faith she learned growing up in Sabbath School

An article of faith learned long ago in Sunday School or confirmation class is all that many people have to rely on for comfort in the face of death

-- A vague hope of life after death in a place called heaven is all that many people have

ILLUSTRATION: TV Show

-mother had cancer -- prompting the father to conduct a religious search

-one day their son asked the mother: *A Mom, if you die, are you going to heaven?@*

-Mother: *AI hope so. I sure hope so.@*

That is all that many people have to rely on when facing death - a vague belief in life after death / and a wishful hope that they will go to heaven

-*How about you? How would you answer your son or daughter: AWhen you die, are you going to heaven?@*

How can you be sure?

--*How can you be sure that you will live forever in heaven after you die?*

II. BELIEF IN LIFE AFTER DEATH VS. RELATIONSHIP WITH *THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE*

Martha believed in the biblical doctrine of the resurrection at the last day

-but Jesus proceeded to re-orientate her faith:

John 11:25 - 26 (NIV) ²⁵Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”**

There is all the difference in the world between believing in the idea of life after death, and believing in Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life

-there is all the difference in the world between believing what a church creed says about heaven and eternal life, and actually knowing Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life

You see, Jesus is not merely a religious teacher who enjoys philosophizing about the immortality of the soul or debating Resurrection vs. Reincarnation

-Jesus is claiming the He Himself is the Resurrection and the Life

-Jesus is saying that the power of resurrection and eternal life actually resides in his person

-Jesus is saying that eternal life is found in him and him alone

If Jesus were claiming to be the Way to Eternal Life in heaven – that in itself would be astounding

--If Jesus were claiming that the power of God working through him was able to raise the dead – that would be astounding

But Jesus is claiming something far more amazing than all of that – *Jesus said to Martha that He IS the Resurrection and the Life*

*Eternal Life is not found in a biblical doctrine or prayer or sacrament or church membership – **Eternal Life is found only in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ Himself IS The Resurrection and the Life***

1 John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Eternal life is in Jesus Christ.

-If you have invited Jesus Christ into your life as your Savior and Lord, then you can know with assurance that you have eternal life and will go to heaven when you die

-If you do not have Jesus Christ living in you, then you do not have eternal life and you will go to hell when you die

You see, if Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, then your eternal destiny depends on your relationship to Jesus Christ

*-it's not about your personal belief system / it's not about your personal morality or goodness / it's not about your church involvement / **it's not even about believing correct biblical doctrines about salvation and eternal life***

-rather, everything hinges on whether or not Jesus Christ lives within you because He is the Resurrection and the Life

Listen carefully: Some of you are counting on the wrong thing to get you into heaven – and you're not going to get there unless you start trusting in the Right Person

--some of you are counting on your good works and moral lifestyle to get you into heaven // some of you are counting on your baptism or confirmation or church membership to get you into heaven // some of you are counting on your belief in a church creed to get you into heaven

--but none of those things will give you eternal life

Listen carefully – *There is only One Way to heaven – it’s a Person – His Name is Jesus – and He is Only One who can give you eternal life because He IS the Resurrection and the Life*

--the only way to receive eternal life is through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – and the sole condition for establishing that personal relationship with Jesus is personal faith – personal trust – not in a doctrine or a prayer or a plan of salvation -- but personal faith in Jesus Himself as your Savior and Lord

Now, the most common way of expressing personal faith and entering into a personal relationship with Jesus is by praying a prayer to invite Jesus Christ into your life as your Savior and Lord

--but it is not the prayer that saves you – it is not saying the right words that saves you – it is the faith in your heart that establishes a personal relationship with Jesus – and it is Jesus who saves you and gives you eternal life

Only those who know Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life can face death with true hope

--Do you have that assurance of eternal life in heaven?

III. THE GRAVE IS OVERWHELMED

After Martha confessed her belief that Jesus is the Son of God, she went back and told her sister Mary that Jesus was asking for her

-whereas previously Mary did not go out to greet Jesus, when Mary heard that Jesus was asking for HER, she got up quickly and went to him

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was, she fell at his feet, and repeated Martha’s complaint: **ALord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.@**

Mary was very special to Jesus / and when Jesus saw Mary weeping, her tears deeply moved him

John 11:33 - 35 (NIV) ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴**“Where have you laid him?”** he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. ³⁵Jesus wept.

Jesus was experiencing a new human emotion – personal grief at the death of a close friend

--The sight of Mary weeping combined with his own grief deeply moved Jesus emotionally

-Along with sympathizing with Martha and Mary, Jesus felt a sense of personal loss at the death of his friend Lazarus

-Jesus was seized by such deep emotion that he began to sob

Maybe there is someone here this morning who is still angry with God because God allowed someone you loved to die

-Maybe you have doubted whether God cares for you any more or not

-Have you ever pictured Jesus weeping with you at the death of a friend whom he also loved?

When the text says in verse 38 that Jesus was deeply moved, the word used here indicates more than sympathy and sorrow - Jesus was also moved to anger and was troubled in his spirit

--the Greek word is actually used sometimes to indicate the snort of a horse – as in war or in a race

--when used of humans, it describes outrage, fury or an outburst of anger

Why the anger?

-Jesus got angry at Lazarus' death for many of the same reasons that you get angry at the death of a loved one

-Jesus saw - and felt - the pain of heartache and separation and suffering caused by death

As Jesus approached the tomb of Lazarus, tears of sympathy filled his eyes, but his soul was gripped by rage

-Death itself was the object of his wrath / not only the death of Lazarus - but every death of every brother and sister, every friend, every child, every parent / every act of senseless violence, every act of brutality, every tragic accident, every terminal illness /
-not only anger at the pain of separation of this brother from these sisters, but also the separations of every husband from every wife, every parent from every child,

-All the pain, all the heartache, all the grief, all the suffering, all the hardship ever caused by death - all of this weighed down on Jesus= heart - and he felt angry

-Angry at death and behind death -- the one who has the power of death -- even the devil whom Jesus had come into the world to destroy

Thus Jesus advanced to the tomb of Lazarus, in Calvin=s words, *As a Champion who prepares for conflict.*@

-Jesus felt the oppressive power of death, and in grieving sorrow and flaming wrath, Jesus approached the tomb of Lazarus to do battle against humanity=s greatest foe –
Death

Jesus ordered that the stone be taken away from the entrance to the cave where Lazarus was buried

-Martha could think of only one reason for opening the tomb - that Jesus wished to look on the face of his dead friend one last time

-she could see no consolation there - dead 4 days already, Lazarus= body would already be starting to decompose

But then Jesus did something which no doctor or scientist could do, then or now / which no King or President or General could do, then or now / which no brilliant scholar or philosopher could do, then or now / which no famous entertainer could do, then or now
-Jesus spoke a word of command that even Death was powerless to oppose

ALazarus, come out!@

Spoken by Buddha or Mohammed or Gandhi or the Dalai Lama or Alexander the Great or Charles Darwin or Bill Gates or Stephen Hawking or Barack Obama or any other man -- nothing would have happened

-but when the words were spoken by Jesus of Nazareth, Lazarus came forth, alive, still wrapped in his grave-clothes

Jesus did what only the Resurrection and the Life could do - he exercised sovereign power over Death itself

-Jesus rules !! Even over death !!

Throughout human history, everywhere in every place in every age, without exception, Death rules - except for the day that Death met Jesus of Nazareth

-At the tomb of Lazarus, as well as at his own tomb a little while later - Jesus proved that He is the Champion who rules over death!

As Chris Tomlin writes in his song, *"I Will Rise"* – ***Jesus has overcome, and the grave is overwhelmed!***

The next time you're tempted to believe someone else's opinions about life after death or reincarnation or many roads to heaven, ask yourself: *Did this self-proclaimed expert ever raise a corpse to life?*

-There is only One True Authority on the subject of Resurrection and Eternal Life, namely the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ!

You see, when a man steps out of his own grave alive from the dead, he is anything that he says that he is, and he can do anything that he says he can do.

IV. JESUS IS OUR LIFE

John 11:25-26 **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”**

First Jesus says that if you believe in Him, you will live even though you die – then he says if you believe in Him you will never die – Which is it?

(NLT) John 11:25-26 “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. ²⁶They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish. “

He who believes in me will live, even though he dies -- If you believe in Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life – you will live again even though you die physically – you will experience life after death

Whoever lives and believes in me will never die -- If you believe in Jesus – you will receive at the moment of accepting Christ a new and eternal life – a spiritual life that will never perish

How about you – are you experiencing that life today?

--There may be some here today who believe in Jesus and are confident that He will give you eternal life in heaven after you die – but you are not experiencing the fullness of the Resurrection Life of Jesus Christ right now

What is it that makes some Christians so full of life? What is it that makes some churches so full of spiritual vitality? What is the evidence of that spiritual vitality? --when a church is fully alive in Christ – when the members of a church are overflowing with the love and compassion and spiritual power and resurrection life of Jesus Christ – then that church will experience people being saved and set free from sin and lives being changed – not by its doctrinal statement – but by the power of the Life of Jesus Christ overflowing within that church body

There is more to experiencing the Life of Christ in its fullness than accepting Christ years ago

--Every day we need to affirm: Jesus, You are my Life

--Jesus, You are my Life

--not only is Jesus our Savior who forgives all our sins // Not only is Jesus the One who will give us everlasting life when we die – but Jesus is our Life now – day by day / moment by moment -- Jesus, You are my Life

The call of the Gospel is not: Come and believe the creeds or doctrines of this or that church and then you will find Life

--The call of the Gospel is: Come to Jesus Christ and you will find newness and fullness of life – Because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life

Therefore, I say: Come, all of you, to Jesus Christ – He is our Life – He is the only One who can satisfy the hunger of your soul – Fullness of Life is found in Him and Him alone

--If you have never come to Christ for salvation – come now

--If you have already accepted Christ as your Savior – but are not experiencing fullness of life – Come to Christ now

-- It's not enough just to come to Jesus Christ once for salvation – we need to come to Jesus daily so that His Life will flow in us and through us

The same power that raised Lazarus from the dead is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and is the same power that will one day resurrect us from the dead

--and that same power that will enable us to live for eternity now resides in our lives today

--that same power is available today for all who believe

Ephesians 1:19-20 ¹⁹I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 3:16-17, 20 (NIV) ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... ²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

“Jesus, You are my Life. I receive and rely upon all the work and triumph of your resurrection, whereby I have been raised with You to a new life, to walk in newness of life, dead to sin and alive to God. I am crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. Lord Jesus, you are now my life, the One who strengthens me. May your passions become my passions. May your compassion for others become my compassion for others. May your resurrection life within me make me fully alive in You. Empower my life and witness and service for you. Release your mighty life-giving power in our church so that we can fulfill your mission for us. We give you the place in our hearts and in our lives that you truly deserve. Jesus, You are our Life.”

**Jesus is the Resurrection and Jesus is the Life. Come to Christ now – saying:
*Jesus, You are my Life***

Prayer of Salvation

Hymn # 220 "He Lives"