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Ellis White  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *I Am the Resurrection and the Life*

John 11

Good morning. My name is Ellis White and I am a Pastoral Intern here at Chapel Hill. The past few months, my wife, Rachel, and I have been excitedly preparing for the arrival of our first baby. As I've been reading, I have been struck by one of the most profound changes between a baby's life in the womb and a baby's life outside of it: breathing. Breathing is something we all take for granted, but those first breaths are really something of a miracle. At the point the baby leaves the womb, its lungs are filled with fluid—they've never had air inside them. And that first breath is like trying to blow up thousands of balloons all at once. And from the moment the baby enters this world, its parents are waiting to hear one thing: the baby crying... because a crying baby is a breathing baby. A crying baby is a baby that is going to live. A crying baby means life.

We've been working our way through John's gospel for the last 6 months, and John is obsessed with life. It's everywhere. Right from the first few verses: 'In him was **life**, and that **life** was the light of men.' Through the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal **life**.' To John's statement about why he even wrote this book in the first place: 'But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have **life** in his name.' Even within the I Am statements we've been looking at in this series, it keeps coming up. Three weeks ago, 'I am the bread of **life**;' two weeks ago, 'I am the light of the world, whoever follows me ... will have the light of **life**;' and last week, 'I am the door... I have come that they may have abundant **life**. I am the good shepherd.'

John is all about life. And why? Because God is all about life. Right back at the beginning of the Bible we are told: 'The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of **life**.' Jesus says that he came that we may have abundant **life**. Our God is a God of life. He wants you to have life, life to the full, abundant life, eternal life, everlasting life. So why is there so much death?

Some parents never hear their baby crying, because it never takes its first breath. Other people experience death through tragedies such as car accidents, others in nursing homes, others through the suicide of a friend or relative. Others watch their parents die at a young age. Wherever it is, death is all around us, and not

just physical death. Many in our culture experience the death of their marriage. Some of us don't know what it is to have a life-giving job; our jobs just feel death-giving. And some even feel dead inside, numb, unable to feel.

And what's even worse, is that for many of us, we prayed and asked Jesus not to let it happen. We asked for a safe birth of a newborn, the healing of a sick relative, restoration in our now dead marriage. But it didn't happen. Jesus didn't come through in the way we asked. And we can't understand why.

Today we're going to meet two sisters—Mary and Martha—who have gone through just that. Their brother Lazarus fell ill, but they sent a message to their friend Jesus—the one who had opened the eyes of the blind man. Surely, he would come and heal his friend Lazarus. But he didn't. Instead, Jesus delayed coming.

And this morning, we are going to read about each of these women meeting Jesus for the first time since their brother had died. And we are going to see Jesus respond in two completely different ways. And as we look at this, think about who you identify more with: Mary, or Martha? Let's turn to John chapter 11 verse 17. Page 907 in your pew Bibles. Keep your Bibles open; we are going to be moving around a bit. First we are going to read about Martha...

[Read John 11:17-27]

So Jesus finally comes, and when he arrives, Lazarus has already been dead four days. He could have come earlier and healed him, but it's too late now. When Martha hears Jesus is coming, she gets up, leaves the house and meets Jesus outside the town. Listen again to what she says, verse 21:

*"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."*

What she's saying is: why? She knows that if Jesus had come earlier, he could have saved Lazarus. But he didn't. She is affirming that God is ultimately good, but right now, in this moment, she can't quite understand it. And yet... somehow... she believes that even now, God will still give Jesus whatever he asks. Somehow, within that why question, there is a seed of hope. All is not lost... Verse 23:

*Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."*

*Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*

All is not lost... Martha knows this. She trusts that Jesus will raise Lazarus at the last day. She knows that she will see her brother again. She knows that she will spend eternity with him in the presence of God. She doesn't understand why Jesus didn't come earlier, but somehow she trusts that on that last day, she will see her brother again, raised from the dead. But Jesus isn't done. Because for Jesus, the

resurrection isn't just a future event. No. The resurrection is something much greater than that. Verse 25:

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

*"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

Jesus says, "The resurrection isn't just a future event. No the resurrection is here... today... and it is here in me! I am the resurrection and the life. The resurrection isn't just some doctrine or belief. The resurrection is a person. The way from death to life is found in me. Right here, right now! Not just at the last day, but today!" And Martha believes it. Even in the midst of that grief and despair, and hopelessness, Martha is able to make one of the greatest statements of faith in the whole of the gospels! I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.

Is that how you would be? In the midst of grieving... when all appears to be lost... when the one who could have saved your brother's life turns up too late... would you be able to make that statement? Would you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Perhaps you could. Or maybe these just seem like empty words to you... Perhaps the pain would be just too great... If this is you, then listen to the interaction of Mary and Jesus. Verse 28:

*And 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.*

Notice how different Mary is from Martha. Martha left the house as soon as she heard Jesus was coming. Martha is the go-getter. In Luke we read about Mary and Martha, and Martha is the one who is rushing about doing all the serving. No wonder she heads out to meet Jesus as soon as he arrives in this story. But in Luke's story, Mary is the one who sits at Jesus' feet and listens. Mary is the quiet, contemplative one. And we see this again here. Jesus has to ask for Mary to come out, she doesn't come by herself like Martha. But when Jesus asks, she does come. Verse 32:

*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."*

Notice how Mary has exactly the same opening line as Martha. It's that same statement: why? She knows that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from dying.

But now it is too late. She knows God is ultimately good, but right now, she just doesn't understand it. But also notice that unlike Martha, Mary falls at Jesus' feet. Mary falling at Jesus' feet is Mary's way of saying: even though I don't understand, I still worship you, and believe in you. She can't verbalize this... it's too difficult in the midst of the grief, but she can fall at his feet in surrender. And Jesus meets her where she is. Look at verse 33:

*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 wept.*

Jesus doesn't tell Mary that Lazarus will rise again, or that He is the resurrection and the life like he did with her sister. He doesn't speak to her at a head level. Instead: Jesus cries. Jesus enters into Mary's sorrow and mourning, into Mary's inability to verbally express where she is, and comes alongside her. The God of the universe, through whom all things were created, who entered into this world in the flesh, weeps with the woman who is weeping over her brother. He doesn't ask Mary to make a confession of faith like Martha, he just cries with her.

Maybe this is where you are at right now. You prayed and asked Jesus to come through for you. But it doesn't seem like Jesus came through. Perhaps you've even lost a loved one just like Mary. And right now, you are a broken person. It's a struggle just to wake up in the morning. Every moment is a painful reminder of lost hope. If so, I want you to know: Jesus is crying right alongside you. Jesus understands your pain: he's been there. And right now, he's not asking you to make some great confession of faith, he's just weeping with you. He knows. He cares.

But perhaps in this story, Jesus is crying for something much bigger than just Lazarus' death. Perhaps Jesus is crying because of the reality of death in this world. God didn't create this world of death and pain. This wasn't what God intended. God created a world of life and goodness. But then... sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. And Jesus is crying because this isn't right. This isn't how it's supposed to be. But... this isn't how it will remain. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He makes all things new. But so that you may believe, Jesus offers us a glimpse of that hope... Verse 38.

*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."*

Martha says: "Jesus... what are you doing? He's been dead for four days. Why would you want to roll the stone away? You could have come and seen him four

days ago, but you didn't. And now you want to see him? Lord... it's going to stink!" In fact, the old King James Version puts it this way, 'by this time he stinketh.' Verse 40:

*Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*

*So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."*

*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."*

Lazarus, the man who has been dead for four days, at the sound of his name on the lips of Jesus, rises up, and walks out of the tomb! Wow! But why now? Why this man? Why not someone else? There would have been other people in that tomb with Lazarus. Why did Jesus only call his name? What about my loved ones who are no longer here?

Well... the truth is, Jesus actually tells us. He did this, so that people might believe. Look at verse 40: Jesus says to Martha, *"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"* Then again in verse 42 he says, *"that they may believe."* We didn't read it, but back in verse 15, Jesus tells his disciples: *"Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."* Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, so that you may believe. So that you may believe that he is the resurrection and the life. In fact, John tells us later in his gospel, that the reason he wrote, was: *"so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* It's all about believing. Believing that Jesus is who he claims to be. Believing that he is the resurrection and the life. Believing so that you may have life.

But here's the kicker... We don't believe. Not really. Yes, we may say that we believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life. But how does that change our experience of death? We fear death. Death haunts us. Death ruins our lives. Why? I think the answer is in verse 39. Look at it again:

*"Take away the stone," Jesus 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."*

You see, to really experience the resurrection power of Jesus, we have to confront the reality of death. But just like Martha, we don't really want to confront death, because death stinks. We roll a stone over it. We cover it up. We move on. And just like Martha did, we confess our belief that Jesus is the resurrection and the

life. But we don't want to let him into the death we have experienced, so that he can actually bring his resurrection power.

As a culture we deny death. We cover it up. We roll big tombstones over it, so that we don't have to think about it. We use euphemisms—nice words—for it like: deceased, passed away, fallen asleep. We turn to alcohol and drugs to cover up the reality of it. Some of us just eat to try and forget about it. Others of us throw ourselves into a frenzy of activity, thinking, "If I just keep going, and don't stop, I will forget about what's happened, and death won't haunt me anymore." Others turn to entertainment: to TV, to DVDs, to surfing the web. In fact, some have said that the whole entertainment industry is just one big distraction from death. In Europe, cemeteries surround churches; literally, you walk past death and into life. But here in America, we put our cemeteries on the other side of Highway 16, with only one entry and exit ramp, so you don't accidentally end up there. We attempt to remove death from our lives. The last thing we want to do is roll away that stone, and allow the reality of death to hit us.

I was speaking with my mother on the phone a month ago about how to bring up a baby. She recalled that as a baby and a toddler, I was extremely emotional. In fact, she couldn't leave me without me crying. I would cry, literally for over an hour at times when she left me. Her friends couldn't believe I could keep going. But then my mother said something I had never heard her say before. She said, "But then you changed, aged 7, almost overnight, when your grandfather died. You stopped crying." And she's right. My wife, Rachel claims she has only seen me cry once. I can't even remember the last time I cried outside of a couple of times at church.

I don't remember all the details about my grandfather's death, but I do remember the evening when my mother told me that he had been taken into hospital, and she would be travelling the two hours that night to go and see him. I remember never getting to say goodbye to him as he died soon after. I also remember my parents asking me whether I wanted to go to the funeral. I just said: "No. I don't think I could deal with it." So I didn't go.

As I reflect back now, I can begin to see what has happened. I was afraid of being abandoned, of being left behind—that's why I cried as a baby when my mother left would leave the room. And when my favorite grandparent abandoned me, without even saying goodbye, I rolled a stone over his death, and tried to forget about it. The problem was, I buried my emotions with him. In reality, I rolled a stone over the dead, hurting part of my heart, and decided never to let anyone who abandoned me again cause me pain.

So when Jesus says he is the resurrection and the life. Yeah I believe it, but don't roll the stone away! Why? Because death stinks. Being abandoned by a loved one stinks. The death of a marriage stinks. And so we cover it up. We roll a stone over it to get rid of the smell. We drink. We eat. We watch TV. We throw ourselves into

a frenzy of activity. We suppress our emotions. We do everything we can just to forget about it.

But today, Jesus is saying: 'Take away the stone.' Take away the stone. Roll it back. Let the smell out. Let it stink. Why? Because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus wants to bring dead things back to life. Jesus wants to cry with you, like he did with Mary, as you finally let him into your emotions. Jesus longs for you to have abundant life. Will you let him? Do you really believe in him? Will you roll back the stone? Will you share your pain with someone you trust? Will you let someone pray for you? Will you let it stink for a while, so that Jesus can bring what's dead back to life?

The band is going to come up and play a song for you. As you listen, pray and ask God what stones you have rolled over the death in your life. And ask him what he wants you to do to roll them back. As the band play, we will have the prayer team and the pastoral team down the front ready to pray with anyone who needs it. Don't miss this opportunity. Don't think that it's not serious enough to come forward for prayer. It is. The Lord is here—come be with him, fall at his feet as Mary did, tell him what's on your mind like Martha—disappointed, angry or brokenhearted, the Lord is here for you, ready to listen, to hear, to cry with you, to share and to respond. I don't mind if we have a hundred people down here. We'll make sure you get prayed for. Take that first step to roll away the stone.

## **Sermon Questions**

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. Who do you identify more with in their grief: Martha, or Mary? Why?
  2. Are you denying the reality of death? What stones have you rolled over the death in your life?
  3. What can you do to roll back those stones and allow Jesus in to bring life?