
I am the Resurrection and The Life



Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor
Sunday Sermon for April 8, 2012
Scripture Passage John 11:1-3, 17-25, 38-44
Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



For 2000 years the cross has been the symbol of Christianity, and the most significant thing is that it is an empty cross. For 2000 years, Christians have been sure of the fact that the death of Jesus and his public execution at the hands of the Roman soldiers was not the last word. Like a cosmic chess master, God still had one more move to make. The cross was not checkmate, and that final move by the King was the fact that Jesus rose and triumphed over the grave.

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity. It is the hinge upon which everything else turns. It must be both a historical reality. That means it is an event which is rooted in history, and it must also be a spiritual reality, which means it is an event which has taken hold in our lives.

We have been looking at the identity of Jesus through the times he says, I am the bread of life, the way, truth and life. We have kept the final powerful declaration of his identity for this Easter Sunday. **I am the resurrection and the life.**

Each time Jesus makes one of these great **I AM** statements, he is facing a real human need in the lives of people. And he is answering that need with himself, with who he is. He is

saying I am the answer to your problem.

For people who are hungry, he says I am the bread of life.

For people in darkness, he says I am the light.

People who are lost, I am the way.

People in doubt, I am the truth.

Now people facing death, I am the resurrection and the life.

This is probably the greatest statement which Jesus makes about himself. We have to see and understand. It does not come after the resurrection. When the disciples had discovered that his resurrection was a reality, it comes before his actual resurrection. Jesus makes this claim before the resurrection actually happens. He does not say, I will be the resurrection and the life, he says **I AM the resurrection and the life.**

Each of us have some close friends, and we know that when we go to their house, we can relax and be at home. We can take off our shoes, sit back, relax, and just be ourselves.

Let me invite you to follow Jesus into a home where he could do just that. It was a family where Jesus could relax. The crowds were gone. No one was trying

to get him to do something, to say some profound new saying, teach a parable. He could just be himself. He could sit back and unwind after a day of ministry and being with people.

The home is in a small village called Bethany. In the home we find two sisters, Mary and Martha, and a brother called Lazarus.

John 11: the setting, what is going on.

1Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. 3So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

Lazarus then dies.

Verse 17:

17On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

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

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

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "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."

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

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 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."

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 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."

Think about it. That must have been one of the wildest and scariest sights that you ever could see. It would be more terrifying than watching a Stephen King horror movie.

Here is this man, still bound in his grave clothes, staggering out of the darkness of the tomb, blinded by the light, wondering what in the name had just happened to him. He hears Jesus. Remember, it is a familiar voice he recognizes. He gives an order. It is a resurrection command: untie him, take off his grave clothes.

There was a movie some years ago, called *Dead Man Walking*. Sean Penn plays the part of a convicted killer who has been sentenced to death, and as the day and hour of his execution approaches, he is taken out his cell for his last walk to the death chamber, handcuffed and shackled, guards close on either side, and as they walk down the corridor in the prison, one of the

guards calls out, **DEAD MAN WALKING**.

As I watched that scene in the movie, I thought, in what way does that actually describe some of our lives? Sure we are all living and breathing. We go to work or whatever we do, but we need to ask, sometimes am I a dead man or a dead woman walking?

Are we like Lazarus, bound by grave clothes, and not knowing the life that Jesus really and fully intends us to live? Are we dead people walking?

Let me unpack that, describe what that might look like.

We can experience that death of **HOPE** in our lives, and we become like dead people walking around. The death of hope leads to despair and depression.

Someone has said that hopelessness is at the top of the list of causes that underlie depression. The person suffering from depression sees a future filled with inescapable pain with no relief and no help in sight.

People suffering from depression become like dead men walking.

Depression is paralyzing, as someone who has suffered from depression, I can tell you that. We have no energy to get off

the chesterfield, to do even the smallest of tasks. We become suffocated by its dust of despair that rises from the death of hope.

This Easter, can you hear Jesus, who stands at the door of this grave of despair, desolation and hopelessness and says, **I am the resurrection and the life**. Untie him, untie her and let her go, so that the warmth and light of hope can flood back into our hearts.

Romans 15

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

So when you struggle with failure, Peter might come and say to you, have hope.

When you struggle with doubt, Thomas steps out of the pages of the Scriptures and says, I have been there, **TAKE HOPE**.

When you struggle with the pressure of life, nothing seems to go right, things pile up, you cannot see the way ahead. A man called Job comes alongside and says, have hope.

One of the things God might want to do in your life this Easter is to untie you, to set you free from the grave clothes of

despair and to resurrect hope in your life.

We can experience the death of **Faith**, which leads to doubt and disbelief. We become like dead men walking, dead women walking.

If the loss of hope paralyses the soul, then doubt which leads to disbelief starves us to death. Our minds do not feed on thin air. Our minds need to feed on the truth and the facts of faith.

Doubt and disbelief narrow the mind. They eclipse the possibility of what God can do. Stones rolled in front of tombs are not a problem for God. Faith invites us to trust God which expands our minds and hearts to believe what God can do.

God may want to stand at the door of your life this Easter, and say, untie him, let him loose to discover what God can do. Untie him from doubt and disbelief and this Easter, he wants to resurrect faith in your life.

Last, we can experience the death of love.

When love dies in us, it does not give birth to hate. Rather it gives birth to apathy. We find it easy to drift into the attitude that simply says, why bother? Who cares? The death of love is apathy. IT is a dust of death that silently falls on us.

God has designed us to love in three main ways: to love God, to love others and also to love ourselves. We stop loving being the person that God calls us to be.

When we slip into the quicksand of apathy, we find that we stop loving God. We stop caring for others, and we also stop loving ourselves.

Apathy is like wearing the grave clothes of death. Without love we are dead men walking. Don't allow the dust of death to choke out hope, faith and love from you.

One of the things that God might want to do this Easter is to stand before your life and say, untie him, set him free from the bonds of apathy.

Charles Wesley, a great hymn:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray
- I woke the dungeon flamed with light.

My chains fell off, my heart was free
- I rose went forth and followed thee.

I also wonder sometimes if the church today is a bit like Lazarus, standing bound and tied up in the grave clothes of hopelessness, the grave clothes of impotence and weakness,

and just as Jesus stood before the grave of Lazarus, called him forth and said, untie him, set him free because **I am the resurrection and the life**. Jesus in the same way stands before his church and declares today, **I am the resurrection and the life**, and the power that called Lazarus out of the grave, and the power that God used to raise me from the grave, resurrection power, is yours.

Untie the church from tradition that has lost its meaning and its life. We need to remember that we live out of the past, but we do not live in the past.

Untie the church from being tied up in the world's games of power and politics. Loosen us to be the people who serve and love.

Untie the church from being bound by the standards of our culture and society. Loosen us to stretch and reach goals for the kingdom.

Untie the church from mediocrity and shallowness. Set it free to live with creativity and strength.

Untie the church from its silly games and petty squabbles, and liberate it to become the people of God, no longer clothed with old rags that smell of death, but clothed with the clothes of righteousness.

Untie the church from being limited to seeing only with our eyes, but set it free to see what can be done with the resurrection power of God.

The one who stands before you and me this Easter, the one who stands before his church says, I can do this. He is the one who says, who declares, **I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE!**