



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Lent 5**  
March 29, 2020

## Raising the Dead, Arousing Faith

### John 11:1–45

<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, *“This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*

<sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, *“Let us go to Judea again.”* <sup>8</sup> The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” <sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, *“Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”* <sup>11</sup> After saying these things, he said to them, *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”* <sup>12</sup> The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” <sup>13</sup> Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus told them plainly, *“Lazarus has died, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”* <sup>16</sup> So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

<sup>17</sup> Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, *“Your brother will rise again.”* <sup>24</sup> Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”* <sup>27</sup> She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

<sup>28</sup> When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” <sup>29</sup> And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

## **Sermon for Lent 5**

March 29, 2020

Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup> Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. <sup>34</sup> And he said, “*Where have you laid him?*” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “*Take away the stone.*” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, “*Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?*” <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “*Father, I thank you that you have heard me.*” <sup>42</sup> *I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.*” <sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come out.*” <sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “*Unbind him, and let him go.*”

<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.

Jesus raised a dead man to life. Think about that. Whoever heard of such a thing? The man’s name was Lazarus. He had two sisters named Mary and Martha. They lived in a town called Bethany, just down the road from Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples often stayed there when they came to Jerusalem.

Well, now, it turns out that Lazarus was desperately ill and about to die. The sisters sent word to Jesus, asking Him to come quickly. “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

But, for some reason, He didn’t go right away. He waited for a couple of days. Why? “This illness does not lead to death,” He explained. “It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Though death would be a part of this story, it would not be the *end* of the story. God would be glorified through this. Jesus *Himself*, would be glorified through it.

So, He delayed, and now Lazarus was dead. Four days he had been dead. And no one could dispute that he was really dead. His body had already started to decay. “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.”



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

## ***Sermon for Lent 5***

*March 29, 2020*

But finally, Jesus arrived at the tomb. There was a large stone covering the entrance. “Take away the stone,” Jesus said. Then He called with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus came out, looking like a mummy, still wrapped in grave clothes. But, here he was, alive and well, his body fully restored. “Take off the grave clothes!” Jesus commanded. For he who was dead had come walking out of the tomb, called forth to life by the Son of the living God.

He’s going to do that again one day – only then, He’ll use your name. And the name of your loved one who has died in the Faith. Your brother, your daughter, your husband, your wife – all those who die in the Lord – Christ will raise from the dead on the last day when He comes again in glory. Take comfort in that, beloved! Rejoice in that! Death is not the end. These mortal bodies that we lay in the ground will be raised immortal, glorified, no longer subject to death, whole and restored, in an even better state than they were before. The raising of Lazarus is a sign, a precursor, of the resurrection to come.

In fact, it’s a sign of Christ’s own resurrection. For He Himself would rise from the dead in the not-too-distant future. The stone would be rolled away. The grave clothes would be left behind. Jesus would arise, leading the way for us, from death into life. He is the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead. First Jesus, then all of us.

So, the most obvious thing Jesus did in this text was to raise a man from the dead. In doing so, He’s telling us today that He will raise *us* from the dead, that He has power over death, that His mighty Word speaks life into our lifeless bodies. “Lazarus, come out!” For Jesus raises the dead.

Another thing Jesus did in this text was arouse faith in Him. He said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

You see, He was calling forth faith from her. Not that she didn’t already have it; she did. She said, “I know that my brother will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” And that’s true. But Jesus leads her to go beyond that, to see what’s standing right in front of her, to help her make the connection between the resurrection on the last day and the one who is the Resurrection, right there before her eyes. Jesus Himself *is* the Resurrection and the Life, Martha. No need to wait for the last day. He’s going to do the job right now!

Oh, to see the connection between Jesus and the resurrection, between Jesus and life – *that* is what faith is all about. That’s what Jesus was leading Martha and Mary, and the disciples, and all the people who were there that day – and *us* – to see: That He, Jesus, is the Resurrection and the Life. He’s calling *us* to put our faith in Him, to believe in Him, to trust in Him – especially at times like this – for He is the one – the *only* one – who can and will raise us up on the last day and give us life now and for all the days to come.



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

## **Sermon for Lent 5**

March 29, 2020

Yes, the life Jesus gives includes the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting, but it also includes life now. Jesus weaves both of these together when He says, “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” – that’s the resurrection from the dead – and then He adds, “and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” That’s life now! You have everlasting life right now, beloved. You believe in Jesus Christ. So eternal life is yours right now. It started when you died and were buried with Christ in Holy Baptism and were raised to newness of life in Him. And that life – the life you’re walking in right now – that life with Christ – will never end. For you are in Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life.

“Do you believe this?” he asks Martha. And she answers, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” He asks the same question of you, beloved: “Do *you* believe this?” God help you to answer as she did: “Yes, Lord; I believe.”

So, in our text Jesus raises the dead and He arouses faith. Finally, He stirs up opposition. This miraculous sign, done right outside Jerusalem is, to Jesus’ enemies, the last straw. They considered Him a threat to their system, to the religious industry they had built up for themselves, a threat to their power. So they called a meeting of the ruling council. “What are we gonna do? Here’s this guy, doing all these things. We can’t let him go on like this. Too many people are starting to follow him. He’s causing too much trouble. The Romans are gonna come in and shut us down. Do we really want to risk losing everything?”

Then Caiaphas the high priest spoke up: “Listen. Don’t you know that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish?” (John 11:50). Now, what Caiaphas meant by that is that they should kill Jesus, get rid of Him, rather than risk bringing the wrath of Rome down on their heads. But, ironically, he was unwittingly, unintentionally, prophesying that Jesus would die as a Substitute for the sins of the nation – indeed, for the whole world, “to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:52). Caiaphas meant it for evil. But God meant it for good.

Of course, Jesus knew that raising Lazarus would stir up a lot of opposition. The last time He was in Jerusalem they tried to stone Him. And His disciples didn’t even want Him to go now. But He went anyway, knowing what was in store for Him.

Jesus was willing to die for our salvation. He willingly, knowingly, rode into that buzzsaw of opposition fully aware of what was coming. And, regardless of the personal risk – in fact, *because* of it – He would go to Jerusalem – He would go to the cross – for you and for all mankind. “It is better for you that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish.” Or to put it more directly: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Christ died for all of us scattered children of God, to bring us together and make us one in Him. Oh yes, He knew what He was doing when He roused the opposition. He was setting in motion the events that would lead to our salvation.



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

***Sermon for Lent 5***

*March 29, 2020*

So, Jesus does three amazing things in our text: He raises the dead, showing us that He has authority over death; He calls forth faith in those who witnessed this miracle, giving them the very faith they needed to believe in Him; and He mobilizes the opposition, knowing that His enemies would seek to kill Him, that through His death He might grant life to the world.

He does the same things for you, beloved, albeit in reverse: Through His death He has already granted life to you and all believers in Him; He has called forth in you faith toward Him, giving you that faith as a gift; and one day He will raise you to life everlasting. For everything He did for Lazarus and the people of his day He does today for those who put their faith and trust in Him. He really is the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Him, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Him shall never die. Do you believe this? I pray that you do. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen