



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Funeral Sermon for Harvey Bielefeld
March 12, 2022

Jesus, Our Resurrection and Life

John 11:28-44

²⁸ *When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”* ²⁹ *And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.* ³⁰ *Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.* ³¹ *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.* ³² *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.”* ³³ *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.* ³⁴ *And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”* ³⁵ *Jesus wept.* ³⁶ *So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”* ³⁷ *But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”*

³⁸ *Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.* ³⁹ *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.”* ⁴⁰ *Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”* ⁴¹ *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.* ⁴² *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.”* ⁴³ *When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”* ⁴⁴ *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.”*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, especially Pat, Jeff, Ron, Jim, and Jennifer . . .

Martha was beside herself. Her brother Lazarus had been dead for four days. She was in mourning, upset because she had sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was ill, but He didn't do anything until he was dead. Martha and her sister Mary could not understand why Jesus acted the way He did. “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (vv. 21, 32b). They both said this to Him, as if it were His fault that Lazarus was dead. But Jesus didn't rebuke them for their emotional outbursts. He loved them dearly, even as He had loved their brother. He said to Martha, “Your brother will rise again” (v. 23). Martha then expressed her faith in Him. “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (v. 24).



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And here we are today, some 2000 years after Lazarus' body was in the tomb. Here we behold Harvey's remains before us, which have a similar destiny. We're here today with myriad emotions. We're surprised, stunned, sorrowful, and perhaps even shocked. We have questions. We dare to ask God: "How could this happen?" Why was Harvey allowed to die? We had included Harvey in our prayers for weeks. Why didn't God answer in the way we had hoped? God is faithful, He fulfills His promises . . . but in His time and on His own terms. We struggle to accept that. We depend on God's promises, but we want Him to act as we wish. It's hard for us when He doesn't. We want to understand, we want to be strong and have faith, but that is often easier said than done.

But this is not a day to be angry; it's a day to rejoice. The Lord blessed Harvey with more than 82 years of life on this earth. The Psalmist writes, "The days of our lives are seventy years, and if by reason of strength they are eighty years" (Ps. 90:10); yet the Lord gave Harvey 82 years of life, and for this gift we thank God, the Lord of life.

We have so many happy memories, don't we. Special times spent together. Sitting in the balcony, listening to him sing in that deep bass voice. Fourth of July cookouts and fireworks. Fly fishing. Apparently, there was something about duct tape on his pants, but I don't remember exactly what that was about. You'll have to ask the kids. Personally, I will never forget my last visit with Harv. We talked for quite a while. We shared some memories that he and I had. We shared a time of prayer and devotion. We shared the Lord's Supper. The next day he was gone. And I was stunned. I thank God for that time. I never, ever, forget it.

If the Apostles' Creed had been formulated during Martha's day, she may well have confessed her faith like this: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." What she said was, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v. 24). She knew the Scriptures. She believed the prophecies. Yet she was still hurting. We, too, have heard the Scriptures. We heard them today in the Epistles (1 Cor. 2:1-12; Php. 1:12-14, 19-27), and in the Holy Gospel (Jn. 11:28-44). We heard the Word as we prayed the Psalm (Ps. 23). We hear the Word throughout the Liturgy today. We hear the comfort our Lord provides us, even as we grieve. We are convinced that Harv will rise again in the resurrection at the Last Day.

But, not only will he rise at the Last Day, he lives this day as well. He now lives with the Lord to all eternity. He lives, for he heard the Word and believed in Him to whom the Scriptures point: his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, his Resurrection and Life. Jesus 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" (John 11:25-26). What does this mean? What does this mean for *us* in light of our service today? Jesus was Harvey's Resurrection and his Life. Harvey believed in Him; though he died, he lives. Harvey lived and believed in Jesus and will never die. Harvey believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world, as Martha confessed, as if she were to confess in the Creed with us, "I believe in Jesus Christ, [God's] only Son, our Lord."



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Harvey lives with his Savior in heaven to all eternity. He has now seen the fulfillment of the promise of eternal life. That promise is now his. But it's *our* promise, too.

How is this possible? Better yet, how is this our reality? Just as He was for Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and now Harvey, Jesus Christ is our Resurrection and Life. He is this on account of His crucifixion and death. Jesus took the sins of the entire world upon Himself on the cross, where He died in full payment for sins. He died for Lazarus' sins, He died for Martha's sins, for died Mary's sins, for Harvey's sins, for your sins, and for my sins. Christ, our Redeemer, bled and died so that, through your God-given faith, you would have eternal life – just as Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and Harvey now have and enjoy. We've been given this promise from the day of our Baptism, the promise that Harvey had since May 28th, 1939, when this promise was sealed on His brow with the water and the Word. Harvey had this promise for a long time, and now he sees its fulfillment, as he is at this very moment seated at the Lord's heavenly banquet, forever singing His praises (probably in harmony). God is faithful to keep His promises. This means that Christ is your Resurrection and Life. By the Holy Spirit, you believe in Him. Though you, too, will die, you, too, will live. You who live and believe in Him shall never die, but shall live forever with your Lord in the mansions of heaven, where you will be reunited with Harvey and where you will see your Lord face to face in all His glory.

Today we weep as those who mourn. But we're not here to say goodbye. We've not seen the last of our brother Harvey. We will see him again when we're reunited with him in the presence of our Savior, our Resurrection and Life. God the Holy Spirit is working in us the faith to believe this promise, as He's been doing since we became members of His kingdom of grace. And now, by faith we look forward to the day when our Lord calls us to our heavenly home, to His kingdom of glory. God grant this in Jesus' Name and for His sake. Amen.