

John 11:24-27

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

²⁴ Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵ Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.^[a] Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷ She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,^[b] the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

It is lovely to be with you all this morning. I had no idea when I offered to be put on the rota for the very first Sunday after Ben had finished that today would have as its focus such a poignant reading. Jesus is speaking about himself as the Resurrection and the Life in the wider context that is the grief of Martha and Mary who have experienced the death of their brother Lazarus. Who Jesus loved. Preaching on this passage, when you have had the shock of saying farewell to Frank Joyce which included the loss of the memorial service, together with the sadness and loss of saying goodbye to your vicar Ben, which again could not

happen as planned because of Covid. This is a bit of a test isn't it.

Into our feelings of loss, of bereavement, Jesus speaks the words today that he spoke over 2000 years ago.

'I am the resurrection and the life. X2

And rather significantly - Do you believe this?

Over the past few weeks you have heard Jesus speak about himself in the I AM statements. You have heard – I am the gate, I am the good shepherd, I am the light of the world. There choices about which gateway/ the door to go through in our lives, we are led by the good shepherd who guides us through the valley of the shadow of death, who sacrifices his life for you, Jesus the light of the world who shines even in the darkest times.

Do you believe this?

Let us take a moment to think about what has happened just before Jesus speaks out about who he is. Mary, Martha and

Lazarus are great friends of Jesus. Lazarus has become seriously ill. The sisters send word to Jesus. They know Jesus is a great healer. This could be an opportunity for Jesus to show his power. But he does not come. Deliberately ignoring the expectation, despite his love for the family Jesus remains where he is. The assumption many make is that this delay was to ensure that there was no question that Lazarus was dead; according to some sources the spirit hovers near the body for 3 days and so Jesus approaches the tomb on the fourth day.

Understandably Jesus is met with a very upset Martha – If you had been here Jesus this would not have happened.

Jesus comforts her John 11:23: "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again' " and Martha assumes that the words "your brother will rise again" refer to the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. Something more remote, further into the future, untouchable.

But Jesus qualifies this and says – I am the resurrection and the life – Do you believe this? Without hesitation and actually

without requesting a miracle or a sign, Martha confesses " I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world".

She recognises that Jesus is the Messiah, THE one who will save, the one who is the Son of God, even though in front of her she sees Jesus as human and mortal as she is. What a woman! What faith! Do you believe this? Jesus asks. I certainly do, says Martha.

Faith is remarkable. In the most difficult of times – in spite of what is going on in our lives, despite what is going on for us, I am sure many of you can testify how your faith in Jesus, has helped you hang on in there – to hold onto hope. Our faith in Jesus gives us hope that although our mortal bodies are fragile and fail, Death is not the End. We say in church on Sunday in the Nicene Creed, perhaps not realising what a prophetic stand we are making:

"We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen”.

The Cof E funeral service speaks into the future, - a future which we do not know for certain what it looks like but we believe Jesus when he says he will go ahead of us, to prepare a place for us : John 14:1-6 Jesus Comforts His Disciples
“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God^[a]; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

A future where everything will be made new. Revelation 21 -
Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from

their eyes. There will be no more death^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

D L Moody – famous preacher said, “Someday you will read in the papers, “D L Moody of East Northfield is dead .” Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now.

As we experience grief and loss in many ways in our lives, we also do not need to wait until we die to experience the life and resurrection of Jesus. As we say in the Creed – we look for the resurrection. There have been so many unbelievably dreadful losses due to this pandemic. Like little sparks of light in the darkness can we recount the signs of hope and renewal, life and resurrection? The new life coming through in nature, laughter of children, the kindness and generosity of human beings, acts of courage faith and love. Perhaps you can think of some now. I am the resurrection and the life – says Jesus.

Do you believe this?

What would it mean for you to say YES today?

When we are fearful and overwhelmed It is a massive act of faith to say yes, but when we do this we are making a stand for Life, for new life in Christ, and we do this knowing that we have a Saviour who accompanies us, who has gone through death before us, who has defeated death, and who will not leave us.

Finish with Nicene Creed.

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,

of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.