

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

**Date: April 21, 2019**

**Title: Do You Believe?**

**Text: John 11:1-44**

This morning we are going to look at John chapter 11. Our key verses are John 11:25-26... *"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?'"*

This is my 20<sup>th</sup> consecutive Easter at Marlowe Assembly. Two years ago I didn't preach the Easter message, Pastor Norm did. I had just had brain surgery a week or so before. Apart from that Sunday, I think I've preached at least one Easter message every Easter Sunday for the past 20 years. I'm rather sure every one of those sermons were about the resurrection of Jesus. This morning, I'm going to depart a bit from that theme. I plan to keep Jesus the focus, but I'll NOT share so much on the details of HIS resurrection today.

Can anyone here tell me the number of resurrections that took place in the Scriptures? The widow of Zarephath's son – 1 Kings 17:17-24; the Shunammite woman's son – 2 Kings 4:18-37; the man raised out of Elisha's grave – 2 Kings 13:20-21; the widow of Nain's son – Luke 7:11-17; Jairus' daughter – Luke 8:52-56; various saints in Jerusalem when Jesus died – Matthew 27:50-53; Tabitha – Acts 9:36-43; Eutychus – Acts 20:7-12; JESUS – Mark 16:1-8 – the resurrection of all resurrections. His death AND resurrection are the focal point of Scripture and the most important events in the history of the world. The resurrection of Jesus is different from the Bible's other resurrections, in that, Jesus' resurrection is the first PERMANENT resurrection. All the other resurrections in the Bible were temporary, in that, those raised to life died again. 1 Corinthians 15 says that Jesus is *"the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."* Jesus' resurrection justifies us (Romans 4:25) and ensures our eternal life: *"Because I live, you also will live"* (John 14:19). So this morning, we are going to focus on the resurrection, BUT we will focus on another resurrection. Who else was resurrected? John 11 – Lazarus of Bethany. The third person Jesus raised from the dead was His friend Lazarus. Word had come to Jesus that Lazarus was ill, but Jesus didn't go to Bethany to heal him. Thus Lazarus died. When Jesus finally reached Bethany, four days AFTER his death, Lazarus' sisters both greeted Jesus with the same words, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* In essence, they were saying, "Jesus, you're too late!"

Any prayer warriors in the house? ANYONE have EVERY prayer you ever prayed answered in an expeditious manner? I didn't think so. Here's the scenarios I suspect we have here today: SOME of our prayers HAVE been answered in an expeditious fashion. Some prayers have NOT been answered yet? Or else we would have no prayer list. Some prayers we have waited a LONG, LONG time to be answered. Could it be that God is late? You needed Him now...and nothing. I've known people who prayed and prayed for their marriage. They prayed and they waited. The marriage failed. I've known people who prayed for God to heal their loved one. They prayed and they waited. That healing never came. I've known people who have prayed for a job, or promotion, or a financial need. They prayed and they waited. The answer they had prayed for didn't come in the speed or fashion they had hoped for. How should we respond when THAT happens?

1. Some give up. They give up on their faith walk. They give up on Christianity. They turn their back on the Lord. They say, in effect, "If God won't give me WHAT I want, HOW I want it and WHEN I want it – what's the use? I hope that is not YOUR response this morning.
2. When it appears that God HAS missed a deadline, the response is often... "I guess it wasn't God's will. I guess He had more important things to deal with. I guess I shouldn't have asked. I guess I didn't deserve it.
3. Sometimes the response is an angry one. "After all I've done for You – this is the thanks I get? Where are You?" There have been many times in my life after praying, that things did NOT go the way I wanted them to. The answer I was seeking didn't come in the hour I was seeking it. AND yes, there HAVE been times when it seemed like it was over, but it WAS NOT over! Such was the case with Lazarus. Maybe Jesus didn't show up in Mary or Martha's time frame, but He STILL showed up. Even when God did NOT show up on MY time table – He STILL showed up! I've learned that many a time that when God didn't show up on my time table, it was because God had a BETTER plan. His ways were HIGHER. What God eventually did was even better than I could have imagined.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember Sister Utz sharing about how long she prayed for her husband to receive Christ. Her husband's first wife had passed away. Sister Utz married a man who was quite a bit older than she, with a goodly number of children. The oldest child was practically Sister Utz's age. She became mother to a child almost her age! How's that for a challenge? If I remember correctly, she prayed for her husband's salvation for the whole of her marriage. By most standards, hers

was a hard marriage, YET she prayed for him daily. And all those years she hadn't really seen any results from her praying. It was in the last moments of his life that he gave his heart to the Lord. On his deathbed, he was asked if he wanted them to call a preacher. It was then that he said, "No, I want my wife to lead me to the Lord. I've watched her all these years. If anyone knows God – it's my wife." What if she had given up? She led him to the Lord before he took his last breath. That prayer was a LONG, LONG time coming! She prayed for him every day of their marriage. It seemed like that prayer might never be answered, BUT...IT WAS!

ILLUSTRATION: I was about 15 when my mom took me to the eye doctor. His office was downtown Hagerstown. I wore glasses, and my vision had progressively gotten worse. My glasses had to be changed about every six months. At one appointment, the doctor said to my mom, "Your son has progressive myopia. He has extreme nearsightedness and it will only get worse." The eye exam that day indicated that my vision was 20/400. What the normal person saw at 400 feet, I couldn't see at 20 feet! He told my mom, "Mrs. Lloyd, if your son was 21 years of age, he would qualify for a blind man's disability pension." He declared me legally blind! (Google says 20/200 is legally blind.) Fortunately for me, he could improve my vision via corrective lenses. Not too long after that appointment, dad and I went to a revival in Martinsburg. My uncle was the evangelist. The service finished and I went downstairs to the restroom. Upon coming out of the restroom, my dad was standing there. He had come looking for me. He informed me that I was going upstairs and they were going to pray for me. I don't think I realized how serious this was. But, my parents were greatly concerned. Dad took me to the front of the church. A group of folks gathered around me and prayed. I had grown up in the church. I had heard the accounts of Jesus healing. My mom had taken us to an Oral Roberts meeting. I saw wheel chairs and crutches surrounding the tent that people had left behind. It appeared that everyone wanted me healed. I knew dad did and I assumed Jesus did as well. Those around me seemed to be praying in faith. So quickly, I took my glasses from my face and broke them in many pieces. I don't think dad was expecting me to break my glasses. I don't think ANYONE expected it. But I had. Now what? If my eyes remained the same, I was going to need another pair of glasses. My dad was not going to be a happy camper. Not only could I remain legally blind, but dad may kill me! Going home in the car, dad challenged me to read the road signs. I read the ones I could read. Since I didn't have a spare pair of glasses, I went without any. Miraculously, I never had a headache. Mom took me to a follow-up eye appointment. While the doctor was examining my eyes, mom asked if he noticed anything different about them. He remarked that they looked much better than before. Then he did the eye test. Without glasses I read 20/40 and 20/60! The doctor was pleasantly surprised. Mom told him folks had been praying for my healing. My eyes WERE better, but I still needed corrective lenses. He prescribed contact lenses as he said they would arrest or slow the nearsightedness. So for most of my life – more than 50 years – I've worn corrective lenses. In October of last year, I had cataract surgery on my left eye. The week following – for the first time in my life – I drove without glasses or contact lenses. The early part of December, I had cataract surgery on my right eye. For about four months now, my vision is 20/15 in one eye and 20/20 in the other! That's been a long time coming. I consider that to be an answer to prayer. I can see the clock and the monitor on the back wall. I can see you sleeping on the back row. I can read the reflection from your cell phone in your eyes – NOT REALLY!

John chapter 11 holds a story in which Jesus seemingly didn't show up on time. During His ministry on earth, Jesus had three close friends whom He liked to visit from time to time. These were three people that the Bible says He loved dearly. Two sisters – Mary & Martha – and their brother, Lazarus. While Jesus was traveling with His disciples, He received word that Lazarus was sick. When Jesus heard the news, He did something a little out of character. He did nothing. He waited. He simply said to His disciples, "This sickness will not end in death," and he stayed where He was for two more days. When He and His disciples arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had died. Even though Jesus had first said, "This sickness won't end in death," Lazarus WAS DEAD! And...his sisters, of course, were heartbroken. The Bible says, *"When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'* Jesus said to her, *'Your brother will rise again,'* Martha answered, *'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'* 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'"* (vs. 20-27). Something important happened in Martha's heart at that moment. She got in on the miracle. She went from thinking that Jesus had MISSED OUT on the situation, to believing that Jesus was the MASTER of the situation, that He WAS in control, that He KNEW what He was doing, that EVERYTHING was going to be fine. She didn't know what Jesus was about to do ... but she KNEW JESUS, and she trusted in Him.

I'm guessing that there are at least a few here who find yourselves in Martha's shoes. You find yourself thinking, "Jesus, where were You? If ONLY You had been here, You could have done something. You have the power to change this

situation. I KNOW You have the power, but WHERE WERE YOU?" If this is a question you've wanted to ask, I know that Jesus' response would be much like the words He spoke to Martha... *"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."* And then He would say to you, as He said to his dear friend, "Do YOU believe this?" What would YOUR answer be?

Today, I want to look more closely at these words that Jesus spoke. They're more than just an inspirational phrase. They are more than just words of comfort to be spoken at funerals. These are words on which you can build your life and base your faith – even when things don't go the way you hoped they would or thought they would or wanted them to. These words of Jesus spoken in John 11:25-26 are words that can sustain you, and even propel you forward during difficult days. These verses point us to one great, powerful, life-changing principle – the principle on which Easter Sunday (and EVERY Sunday, for that matter) is based. That principle is that JESUS HAS POWER OVER DEATH AND LIFE. He is more powerful than any problem you will face. There is no situation you can endure, no reversal you can experience, that Jesus can't resolve, to the glory of God. This is the promise of Scripture, and it is the experience of millions and millions and millions of believers throughout history.

Just so you know, it's MY experience, too. I have been through more "Jesus, where were You" experiences than I can count. 17 years ago the doctor told me my wife would die. 7 years ago I was diagnosed with kidney cancer and a mass was removed the size of a soccer ball. 2 years ago a scan indicated I had a brain tumor. A couple months ago, a genetic counselor in Georgetown emphatically told me I had a dreaded genetic disease referred to as VHL. Tumors and medical scans would be the norm for the rest of my life. I could lose my sight and my hearing. My most recent scans indicate all is well. My genetic testing of a few weeks ago came back negative. I don't have the genetic disease! Thank YOU Jesus! In those situations, the end result was the same: God's solution to the situation was greater than anything I ever could have imagined. Though the journey has been incredibly challenging – I have to say – it was worth the wait. I want us to spend a few minutes looking a little more closely at these two verses of Scripture. There are some truths here to keep in mind during those seasons in which you feel like you're left waiting for Jesus to arrive. The first thing I want you to see is...

**1. The resurrection power of Jesus means that there will still be death to overcome.** Here's a very simple and basic principle. You CANNOT experience resurrection power without a death. There is an idea that rests in the back of many a mind that says, "If God is real, if Christianity is true, if Jesus really is all-powerful, then my life should be a perpetual picnic. If it's not, then I guess that means I can't depend on God." The power of the resurrection doesn't mean that you get to coast through life without any turbulence whatsoever. There WILL be turbulence! There WILL be setbacks and defeats and even deaths. BUT... You can't experience the power of the resurrection until you have first experienced the pain of death. I am not just talking about when this natural life comes to an end. I'm talking about the many deaths we endure in the course of our lives. The death of a RELATIONSHIP. The death of a DREAM. The death of a JOB or CAREER. We are not immune to death. We can't avoid it, but through the power of Christ we can OVERCOME it. Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection"* BEFORE He went to Calvary. He is the resurrection and the life...but...HE still had a death to endure and...HE still had a grave to conquer. I want you to know that the challenges that you face today and the challenges that are coming your way do NOT diminish God's power. But if you let them, they can be used to DEMONSTRATE God's power. Don't make the mistake of thinking that just because Lazarus is dead, Jesus missed the opportunity to do something about it. In a very real sense, these deaths that we endure are necessary in order for us to experience God's resurrection power. There will always be deaths to overcome. Thank God we know the ONE who overcame death ONCE AND FOR ALL! This brings me to the second thing I want you to see.

**2. The resurrection power of Jesus means that even in the midst of death, God can create life.** Jesus said... *"He who believes in me will live, even though he dies..."* Lazarus had died a physical death, but Jesus was talking about much more than physical death here. Yes, His words apply to eternal life in Heaven, but... if that was the only point Jesus needed to make, He could have left Lazarus where he was. Anyone know and memorize what John 11:35 says? *"Jesus wept."* Shortest verse in the Bible. Literally means – He burst into tears. Now WHY did Jesus weep? Some see it as grief over Lazarus' death. How could that be? Jesus knew He was going to raise him. Maybe he was weeping FOR Lazarus. Raising him from the dead meant He was about to call him back from the bliss of Heaven. Lazarus had gone to the place of his reward and is now called back to the rigors of earthly life again. Maybe it was His sympathetic reaction to the grief of others. *"His heart is touched with our grief."* Here's what I believe – Jesus wanted to demonstrate that in THIS life, in the HERE and NOW, even in the midst of death, we can experience new life. And, He showed us that His power is about more than the "Sweet By and By" when He stood outside the grave and shouted, *"Lazarus, come forth!"* It doesn't matter how dead something appears to be, God can still make life out of it. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been

laid in the grave. He had been there 4 days! 4 days without breathing. Google says the average person can live about 3 minutes without breathing. The average person loses consciousness after about a minute of not breathing. Irreparable brain damage will happen 1 to 2 minutes after that. Death about a minute later. By most standards, you are for sure dead after 4 minutes of not breathing. Lazarus hasn't breathed for FOUR DAYS!!! He was as dead as dead could be. His body had already started to decay. Jesus told the mourners to roll away the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. Martha objected to this idea, saying (as the King James puts it), "*Lord...he stinketh.*" EVERYONE there was focused on how completely dead Lazarus was. NOT Jesus. He was thinking about how alive Lazarus would soon be. He performed this miracle in Bethany so that today, two-thousand years later, we can see that same kind of power at work in our lives. It doesn't matter how dead your situation seems to be. It doesn't matter how much your situation stinks. God can still bring life into the situation. And... you never know how it will be done. I've known couples whose marriage was long dead and rotting in the ground. There wasn't a single spark of life remaining, BUT GOD was somehow able to bring that marriage back to life. On the other hand, I've also known people whose marriage wasn't saved, whose spouse moved out and married someone else, eliminating the chance of reconciliation. Again and again I've seen how God is able to breathe new life into that broken situation, to remove the pain of the past and give a new and meaningful future. Just because your situation is dead today, doesn't mean that it will be dead forever. Even though you die, you can still live. And... it doesn't matter how dead you may be. You can still experience new life in God. This brings me to the next thing I want you to see.

**3. The resurrection power of Jesus means that the overcoming life is ours for the asking.** Jesus said... *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.*" Those are some intriguing words. What is Jesus saying? What does it mean today? He's being a little poetic when He says, in effect, "He who dies will live and he who lives will never die." But... He's not just turning a phrase to be clever. He has a word for us. He's trying to teach us something. "*Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*" Is He talking about physical death? Probably not. Our bodies eventually die. "*It is appointed unto man once to die...*" Even Lazarus died again. Was Jesus talking about eternal life, and Heaven? That's PART of it, yes. But... not ALL of it. When Jesus said, "*He who lives and believes in me will never die,*" He was talking not about physical death, but He was talking about THIS LIFE and ITS CONNECTION to eternal life. Just a few verses before this story began, we read in John 10:10, Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" He also said that the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, but... HE came so His followers would have life, and have it abundantly. Jesus promised His followers a victorious, overcoming life. Not someday, but THIS day. Jesus doesn't ask you to wait until "the roll is called up yonder" before you can experience the fullness of His power in your life. You can experience it NOW. You can live every day in His resurrection power, until that day you receive your final promotion, and are called to your eternal home in Heaven. I want you to understand that eternal life does NOT begin only when you cross the "chilly Jordan." It begins NOW. His power begins NOW. You WILL face problems in this life, and you WILL experience setbacks, and you WILL get knocked down from time to time, and death WILL come at you from every direction, BUT YOU WILL OVERCOME, because "*He who lives and believes in me will never die.*" You can live your life on this earth victoriously, and with a shout of triumph you can go home to live with Jesus for all eternity. When Jesus said "*I am the resurrection and the life,*" He was talking about Heaven, but not JUST Heaven. Heaven is for real, but it's not all there is to the Christian life. The Christian life is meant to be lived in victory TODAY.

**Conclusion.** After Jesus said to Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life,*" He then asked her a simple question: "*Do you believe this?*" Martha didn't know what Jesus planned to do. I'm thinking that she didn't imagine something so spectacular. Maybe she did. Before Jesus asked her IF she believed, she spoke a beautiful phrase that revealed the attitude of her heart. "*But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask*" (vs. 22). Then she answered His question: "*'Yes, Lord,' she told him, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world'*" (vs. 27). At this moment she not only put her faith in Jesus, she put her trust in Him, too. There's a subtle difference. It's one thing to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. It's another thing to really TRUST Him with the outcome of your situation. However, when you put your situation fully in His hands, don't be surprised if – like Lazarus – His solution to your situation will be better than anything you can imagine. If you're waiting on God, and He SEEMS to have missed your deadline, I want to remind you that IT'S NOT OVER. He's on His way. He may have missed YOUR deadline, but He never misses HIS deadline. Maybe your situation seems to be as dead as it can be. Maybe even to the point that it "*stinketh,*" BUT...it's not over! He's on His way. Soon He will be calling your name: "Come forth." Come out of the grave of sin and defeat and despair and hopelessness, and step into God's resurrection power. Where do you begin? You begin where Martha began. You say, "Yes Lord, I believe. I believe that You are who You say You are, and I TRUST YOU with my future, and I ask You to fill my life with Your resurrection power today, and every day, until the day I see You face to face."