

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When 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?”**

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

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.”**

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. **This is the Gospel of our Lord.**

Dear Friends in Christ,

There once was a store that caught fire. The store only occupied the 1st floor and there was an apartment on the 2nd floor. The fire spread very quickly. There was a woman who lived in the 2nd floor apartment and when she realized what was going on, it was too late to escape by going down the stairs as she would normally do so she headed for the roof of the building. She made it to the roof but the smoke was so thick that the woman couldn't see the ground or much of anything. Soon she heard a voice yell, “Jump! We'll catch you.” She didn't know who was yelling and couldn't see them – should she trust the person who was telling her to jump? Did she believe him? Well, she did and she jumped and the firemen below caught her and she was safe.

In a way this illustrates the question that Jesus asked Martha and the question he asks us as well. When it comes to God's Word and his promises, **“Do you believe this?”** As we consider this portion of scripture may we see that the events unfold so that Jesus can show us that, **“He is the resurrection and life.”** And that we, along with Martha, can answer **“Yes, I believe.”**

Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick he did not go to see him. It's not that he didn't want Lazarus to get better but he was going to use his visit to help his followers to see a glimpse of his glory as he raised Lazarus from the dead and as he explained that he has the power over death and the power to give life.

And so Jesus came to Bethany 4 days after Lazarus had died and been buried. Martha heard that he was coming and came out to greet him. She was glad to see him and she made an interesting statement, **"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."**

Some think that Martha was rebuking Jesus – that she was mad at him for not coming earlier while her brother was still alive. But as we consider the whole conversation, we can see that this wasn't an accusation but a statement of faith. She was stating that she knew Jesus had the power to heal her brother and if he had come earlier, she had complete faith that he would have been able to heal Lazarus. And then she said, **"But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."** Was she asking Jesus to raise her brother from the dead? I'm not sure because the rest of the conversation seems to indicate that maybe she was asking for comfort at this time rather than a miracle.

Jesus had words of comfort for her, **"Your brother will rise again."** Martha understood this to mean he would rise on the last day. Sort of like when we try to comfort someone who has lost a loved one by telling them that you will see them again in heaven. Martha didn't understand what Jesus was telling her but, in her answer, she again expressed her faith in the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day.

Then Jesus spoke those wonderful words of promise, **"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."** Very simply put, Jesus was telling her and us that he is the key to spiritual life and the key to our own resurrection. Because Jesus suffered and died for our sins and then rose 3 days later, his resurrection assures us of spiritual life now which will take us into everlasting life in heaven forever.

Paul reminded us in our 2nd lesson this morning that the Holy Spirit lives in us and so we are alive in Christ. The Holy Spirit connects us to Jesus' death which brings us forgiveness for our sins and to Jesus' resurrection which removes the sting of death and assures us that we too will rise on the Last Day.

When Jesus asked Martha if she believed this, she once again gave him a confession of her faith, **"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."** It is easy for us to forget that Martha didn't have the whole picture. She didn't know that soon Jesus would go to the cross, suffer and die and then rise 3 days later but she believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Savior and so she believed and trusted in him for her salvation even though she didn't always understand what he was telling her.

It was time for Jesus to help her to see what he meant. They went out to the tomb of Lazarus and Jesus asked that the stone, which covered the opening, be removed. When Martha objected

Jesus said, **“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”** Through the eyes of faith Martha was about to see a glimpse of God’s glory displayed in a miracle.

“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.” Before the miracle Jesus prayed so that those watching would know that he is God’s Son and the power over death comes from God.

Then Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave and he came out. What a joyous moment that must have been for all those that were there. This miracle not only helped Martha understand the words Jesus had spoken but we are told, **“Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.”**

Jesus is the source of our spiritual life just as much as he was the source of Martha’s spiritual life. Jesus paid for our sins and sent the Holy Spirit to give us the gift of faith so we can receive forgiveness, life and salvation. The Spirit lives in us and keeps us connected to Christ’s death and resurrection. The sting of death is gone for all believers. This all comes to us because of God’s grace and mercy. It doesn’t depend on us but rests completely on Christ who has done it all for us.

I have heard and read the words of Jesus many times, **“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?”** Yes. I believe this with all my heart. As we continue our Lenten journey to the cross and to the tomb of Christ, we do so with a new perspective. The tomb of Christ is not a tomb of defeat but a tomb of victory because his tomb is empty. That makes all the difference in our lives as he calls us from death to life and brings comfort to us in our troubles. Amen.