

*John 11:1-53*  
**“Life Doesn’t End in Death”**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent (A)**

**March 26, 2023**  
**Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.**  
**Pastor Peter Adelsen**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The world has an obsession with death. That is, until death becomes a personal reality.

So, what is this obsession? If you watch TV, or read the local newspaper, death is a major part of the news. But so often, political correctness is used to soften words by sugar-coating and destigmatizing the reality of death. “Reproductive healthcare” is said in the place of elective abortion. “Physician-assisted suicide” or “Medical Assistance in Dying” are said in the place of euthanasia.

From politicians to ballot referendums, death is even on the ballot. When death doesn’t affect you, it may seem easy to make a choice. But you may recall, that not too long ago, seemingly everyone was thinking about their own mortality.

As soon as those lockdowns began three years ago, I bet you were thinking about your own mortality. Television and print news gave us daily tallies on the infection rates and death count. We were told to social distance. We were told that just by being near others, we could cause their death. Schools were closed. Businesses shuttered. Playgrounds were covered in caution tape. As everyone was in need of hope, churches, too, closed under the abundance of caution. For so many, death seemed imminent. Through fear, the experts led many to believe that just catching Covid-19 was a death sentence.

As Covid-19 came on the scene, so many people had to actually think about their own mortality. At that same time, there was the push to find a cure from death. The thing is, death was still a prospect before Covid-19. Funerals happened before Covid; obituaries, too.

No one wants to die, even if some say that people have that right. Everyone fears death. If we could, we would rather avoid death altogether. But at some point, in our life, we will all have to experience death. But Jesus tells us something today that seems unreal, but it is very real. He says life does not end in death.

Now, there is certainly physical death. Lazarus experienced this death. Lazarus was dead. And when Jesus finally came, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Today, we may think that four days doesn't seem all that long. After all, you have likely been to a funeral for someone who died days to a week ago. But in the first century, embalming chemicals didn't exist yet. So, within minutes of death, decomposition begins. Without life, death takes over. Internal organs begin to decompose within days. So, needless to say, a stench was filling the tomb of Lazarus.

This death that Lazarus experienced is the death that we will all one day experience. Death is inescapable unless Christ returns first. So, until that glorious day of Christ's descent from heaven – *with a cry of command, the voice of an archangel, and the sound of the trumpet of God* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) – death is your fate. You may experience a sickness, like Lazarus. Or your death may happen in an instant, like in a car accident. So, unless Christ returns first, we will all experience death, since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a).

Death is a basic human problem. It belongs to us because of Adam's fall into sin. As far as we know, human beings are the only creatures on earth who know that death is in their future. Because of this, we are concerned about death. We are conscious that death stands at the end of our lives, and this fact affects us all. Death affects us here and now.

Physical death certainly affects those who are still living. The death of Lazarus affected Martha and Mary, and those in the community who came to console with them. And this sorrow even affected Jesus. When Jesus saw Mary and the community weeping, Jesus was deeply moved and He began to weep. The death of loved ones affects us all, but we all grieve in different ways.

For us who are still living, losing a spouse, a parent, a grandparent, other family members and friends affects us. We can't visit them anymore. We can't give them a call. We soon realize that there is a void. We can't change the reality of physical death.

But death would soon become the reality for Jesus. His return to Bethany would result in His arrest and crucifixion. By returning to Judea, Jesus was putting His life at risk, since the Jewish authorities were seeking to arrest Him for equating Himself with God. Even His disciples were aware of this: ***“Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again?”*** (John 11:8)

Jesus was in danger, but He knew He controlled His time on earth for He said: ***“No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord”*** (John 10:18a).

And upon the news of Lazarus’ resurrection, the Jewish authorities began plotting on ways to get rid of Jesus. Caiaphas, the High Priest, feared that the Romans would take away their authority, due to the popularity of Jesus. The Sanhedrin were at their wits end, since they have tried everything else, but without any success. ***“What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation”*** (John 11:47-48).

The Sanhedrin feared the Romans more than they feared God. They feared losing their status. So, ironically, just as Jesus spoke of His death to His disciples before arriving in Bethany (John 11:13), Caiaphas prophesies: ***“It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish”*** (John 11:50).

Now, Christ’s death was a real necessity. You see, God the Father’s anger over the sins of all mankind had to be appeased by the sacrificial death of Jesus. All our wrongs of thoughts, words, and deeds could only be forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The effects surrounding the death of Lazarus were but a small picture of the effects of sin that Jesus would carry to His own death. Our sin saddens God. Jesus wept. Our sin demands atonement. Jesus’ death.

Upon inspiration, Isaiah prophesies this: ***“He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed”*** (Isaiah 53:5). This healing includes more than just forgiveness. This healing includes the resurrected life.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. His proof for His claim is in raising Lazarus from the dead. Four days in the tomb were not match for the resurrection and the life Jesus claimed as His own and which He gave to Lazarus. Three days in the tomb were no match for the resurrection and the life Jesus claimed as His own following His own suffering and death on the cross.

Really, any time in the tomb can be no match for the resurrection and the life Jesus claims as His own and which He has given to us. You see, everyone who lives and believes in Jesus will never die! At once we believe that, we never die.

Now, we may not fully comprehend Christ's complete power for us in the resurrected life we have now, but by faith in Him, we have eternal life now.

Jesus is the resurrected life. He has given us faith in Him through the waters of Holy Baptism. He strengthens this faith as we hear and read His Word. He strengthens this faith as we receive pardon and peace through absolution and in His Body and Blood under the bread and wine broken and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus has given us the blessing of resurrected life that we have now. For since we ***“were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised form the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”*** (Romans 6:5) and ***“whoever believes in the Son has eternal life”*** (John 3:36).

By faith in Jesus, though we die, we shall live! This is His promise to us!

So, in the midst of our weak and frail life on earth, we have the powerful Lord Jesus whose resurrected life affects us today. We still grieve when a loved one dies. But we don't grieve in despair. We grieve in a sure and certain hope, since Christ fulfills each and every promise, including the promise of the resurrection from the dead.

So, life does not end in death. We will all rise again on the Last Day and forever celebrate the joy of life that we have now in Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**