

“We Must Rise Up and Come Forth”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, Pastor, Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA 4/4/2021

John 11:25-26

When Jesus said “I am the resurrection and the life,” responding to Martha’s answer that her dead brother will rise up in the last days, he was offering new life in this lifetime, in this place, in this kingdom. The next kingdom wasn’t the issue; it was this one that became particularly important. It begs the question, not “What are you going to do and where are you going to be?” But instead, “What are you doing now and where are you doing it?” And for Martha the answer of “he will rise up in the last days” quickly became “he will rise now, here.”

The Greek word used in the Scriptures for resurrection is “anastasis,” meaning quite literally “to rise up.” Remember though, it does not include “stepping out,” so when Jesus raises his friend Lazarus from the dead, he calls him to come out of the tomb. “Lazarus, come forth.”

And some of you may ask me, “Do you believe in actual resurrection or just a metaphorical one?” I believe in both. I believe in resurrection of heart, mind, and soul—but I also believe God has mercy on us at times that I cannot begin to comprehend. I have seen resurrection with my own eyes. I have seen our son stop breathing and then sit in painful unconsciousness for much longer than humanly acceptable as I cry out to the God of resurrection for help, and to eventually see our son revived, taking in earthly breath once again only reminds me of the power of resurrection, both physical and spiritual.

Let us take a moment to ponder moments of resurrection in your life. For you personally, perhaps, or for those you love. Think about physically resurrection. Powerful moments indeed. Now, think of spiritual resurrection. What were those moments for you. Find them, carefully revisit them. Do not forget their power. (pause for a few moments)

I really think it is in the second part of Jesus’ raising of Lazarus that the real power of resurrection becomes most impacting. Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb—just like Jesus, himself, would later vacate his own tomb one week later. So, even if you believe in resurrection and you believe you have risen from the ashes of a broken life, if you choose to stay in the tomb... how can you truly live again? Can you imagine if Lazarus had stayed in the tomb after he’d resurrected? What a terrible new life that would have been. Imagine if Jesus had stayed in his tomb after he’d resurrected. Fortunately, in both cases, they had help. They weren’t alone, were they? No. They had community. They had people to help them—someone to advocate for them, to love them even while in the grave, and then to later roll the stone away, someone to call them out and back into community once again, and someone to hold them afterwards.

So when Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life, and the one who believes in me, though dead, shall live,” he is referring to the here and now. Jesus represents life, life on this earth. Many think of Jesus as representing life in the future life, like in heaven. But no, Jesus, himself, said he is the resurrection in this life. He told Nicodemus, “you must be born again.” Jesus is all about transformation,

here, and now... not in a distant future. No. So let us each find new life today, and tomorrow, and the day after that. May we make a choice to rise up and come forth out of the tomb, and don't forget to roll the stone away from others, and lovingly call them out with you. Be the community God wants us to be, a loving, caring, resurrecting community filled with life.

Shalom