

‘Living to Die’ or ‘Dying to Live’

1. Warm-up Question: Here are some common Easter phrases. Pick one and tell us what memory it evokes within you.

Easter Bunny

Easter Basket

Easter Dinner

Easter Dress (or Suit)

Easter Play

Easter Travel

2. Sunday’s sermon began with a soliloquy from Mary Magdalene in an effort to imagine what she must have felt when she first encountered the risen Christ.
 - a. Read John 20:11-18. What emotions must have surged through Mary when she realized Jesus was alive?
 - b. Jeff shared a true story about a minister who took a nap in the back of a hearse, then woke up at the gas station and nearly scared the gas station attendant to death. It’s a moment the attendant will never forget. Mary must have felt the same about her moment with Jesus. In your own life have you ever had an encounter with someone that was so stunning, you’ll never forget it?
3. Colossians 1:18 says, “Jesus is . . . the firstborn of the dead. . . .” In other words, his resurrection was just the first of what’s supposed to be an ongoing resurrection phenomenon, because “the [same] Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead [now] dwells in you.” Romans 8:11. That means we’re supposed to be full participants in Jesus’ resurrection power right now. Our Gospel passage from Sunday explains how that’s supposed to work. Let’s divide the story in two. First, the tragedy. Read John 11:1-21, selected verses printed on p. 3.
 - a. Why did Jesus’ delay his response to Mary and Martha’s request for help?
 - b. How do you think Mary and Martha felt on the day Lazarus died when Jesus was still nowhere to be found?
 - c. When Martha encountered Jesus, she pointblank said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Suppose you’re playing the role of Martha in a play. How would you deliver this line?
 - d. In your own life, when have you most felt like saying, with disappointment or indignation, “Lord, if you had been here, this would not have happened? How did that disappointment affect you and your faith?
4. In the second half of the story, we focused on Jesus’ response to Martha. Read John 20:23-44, selected verses also printed on p. 3.
 - a. When Jesus said, “Your brother will rise again (v. 23),” Martha replied, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day (v. 24).” In other words, for Martha resurrection was a concept that will be realized only at some distant future

date when we wake up in heaven. But we can't wait till then to access resurrection power. During our present life, we will all face a million metaphorical deaths that try to suck the life out of us long before we die – the death of a relationship, the death of a job, the death of a dream, etc. Tell us about something that died in your life in recent years.

- b. When Martha said she knew her brother would rise again at the end of the age, Jesus responded by saying, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Note that his words are in the present tense. What point is Jesus trying to make?
 - c. In John 12:24, Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” What’s his point and how does it apply to our everyday lives?
 - d. Jeff said, some people are “living to die,” while others are “dying to live.” What do you think he meant? What’s the difference?
5. J.R.R. Tolkien spoke of “eucatastrophes” [you-catastrophes], which is a play on the Greek word for the Gospel. “Eu” means “joy.” Tolkien saw the death of Jesus as the ultimate “eucatastrophe” because it resulted in the resurrection. Tolkien believed we, as understudies of Jesus, are meant to repeat that same pattern in our lives in many ways large and small, turning defeat into victory, turning death into life.
- a. When have you observed someone turn a stinging defeat into a glorious victory? How did watching that transformation make you feel?
 - b. After Jesus challenged Martha to realize that resurrection is not just a distant future concept, but something to expect in the here and now, he asked her, “Do you believe this?” John 11:26. What deadness (or defeat) in your life right now do you need to dare to believe can be transformed into something wonderful? What next step might put feet to your faith in that situation?
 - c. In Vincent van Gogh’s masterpiece “The Raising of Lazarus,” he put his own face on Lazarus as his personal confession that God had the power to raise even him from deadness in his life. When have you found yourself in the role of Lazarus? What’s one of the most marvelous resurrection experiences you’ve had in your life so far?



Part 1 = John 11:1-21, selected verses

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. . . . ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7 Then after this he said to the disciples . . . , "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Part 2 = John 11:23-44, selected verses

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said, "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. 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. . . ."

38 Then Jesus, greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha . . . said, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days." ⁴⁰ 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. And Jesus looked upwards and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."