

February 21, 2024  
The Second Wednesday of Lent  
Pastor Matt Duerr

“I AM: Resurrection, Life and NO!”

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father, and from our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Lent, last week we started with Ash Wednesday, and we heard about the I AM statements where God's name I AM literally is. He is the literal state of being of everything. But we also heard from ashes you came or from dust you came; and to dust you will return. Lent; it's kind of like Paul Harvey. If you ever heard him, he would always end his radio monologue with, and now you know the rest of the story. Good days.

Well, that's Lent. It's the rest of the story. It's forty days of preparing for polar opposites. Forty days preparing for Good Friday, the ultimate tragedy. God's Son is dead! An event so profound that creation reacted. Creation mourned, the sun quit shining, the earth shook. It was such a profound event that the Roman Centurion standing guard said, “Truly, this man was the Son of God.”

And yet it also prepares us for Easter and the angel speaking to the women of the tomb, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is risen, just as He said.” Just as He said, what a loaded statement that angel gave to those women. What did Jesus say? I AM! And it wasn't just with the Pharisees in John chapter 8.

We'll Fast forward to John 11 for this week. It's another dark scene. We read, “There was certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha.” Then John was like, you know, maybe I should give a little more information. So, he adds, “It was Mary, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.’ And well quote, “they sent to him, saying, Lord him who you love is ill.” I have to do a quick time out here; no, this is not what some people today are writing. This is not a homosexual relationship. This is not about sex. This it is not eros here, it is philia love, the brotherly love. This is like the love that David had for Jonathan and Jonathan had for David in the Old Testament. A bond of love that can override storge

love, and eros love. It's a close brotherly love where we're one. What was Jesus's response to this word that Lazarus, his close brother is sick? This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified, And John records, He stayed two days longer. In other words, Jesus did nothing.

Then after two days, He says to his disciples, Let us go to Judea again. And the disciples response. 'We were just there, and the Jews tried to stone you.' When we look previous chapter, indeed they had been in Jerusalem, in Judea at the feast of dedication and this is where Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one' and the Jews picked up stones to stone Him. So, there's a little trepidation on the part of the disciples here about going back to Jerusalem. But Jesus then explains to them, 'our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. But I go to awaken him.' And the disciples? 'He's asleep? Jesus, this is good. Sleep is good. He's getting better. Why don't we just stay here in the northern area and not go back down there?' In other words, we don't feel like a good stoning staying. And so Jesus has to explain to them quote, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe. " But let us go to him.

Thomas oftentimes gets a bad rap. He pretty well lays it out for Jesus and for the other disciples. Let us also go that we may die with him. By the way, this is basically the last trip to Jerusalem as well. So, a little bit of truth there in what Thomas says, Jesus is going to die? When we look at our gospel, we see that it took two days to get there, so four days total had passed by. And John records this that it was on the 4th day. Why? Well, it is significant because according to Rabbinical custom, you weren't truly dead until the 4th day. The soul was gone, but it hung around the body for three days trying to find a way back in. So, Jesus went until he was, shall we say, dead, dead.

And Martha hears that Jesus is coming and she goes out to meet him right away. Oftentimes Martha gets a bad rap but listen to her words. "If you had been here, our brother wouldn't have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give to you." What a crazy statement of faith. Let's chalk one up for Martha. And Jesus comes back and listen again carefully to what He says. "Your brother will

rise again.” There's a little clue there. If he's going to rise again, what does he have to do first? He has to rise a first time. And so, what's the again talking about? Well the again, is talking about Judgment Day and that's immediately where Martha goes and it would a great statement of faith. “I know that on the last day he will rise.” And that's then when Jesus comes back and He says and He starts out. I AM in the Hebrew Yahweh, in the Greek Ego Ime.

“I AM.” There it is, the name. That ultimate state of being, the everything. I AM. Abraham was. Was what? Abraham as we saw last week, just was. It doesn't talk about his birth, doesn't talk about his life. When Jesus said before Abraham was. Was what? “I AM. I AM. That everything statement. I am what? You fill it in. Yes, that's right. Jesus says I am and as such. He is, as He says, the resurrection, there is no other, and the life, there is no other. Whoever believes in me, even though he dies, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. All of this is tied to the I AM. I AM able to do all of this!

But what's interesting here? Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die, “shall never,” That's two English words. In the Greek it's five. It's “Ou May Ice Ton Ione Ah.” And what do all of those mean put together? The absolute negative, absolute denial, forever. It's a double, like in the Hebrew language. It's a doubling of saying no never no, no, no. Whoever lives and believes in me, no, no, never, never, dies. Because we have life. And that's the life we rise to. A life that no longer has death. It's kind of cool how Jesus said that, really emphasizing He is the life. And that's what we have to look forward to.

So, going back to the beginning of the sermon, do we now know the rest of the story? Well again, I quote that great John Wayne in the movie Big Jake, “not hardly!” The most important part immediately follows. Because Jesus didn't just say that. He followed it right away with “Do you believe this?” Do you believe that I am the I am? Do you believe that I am the resurrection? Do you believe that I am the life? Do you believe that I am the absolute never, never die person who holds the key to that?

And Martha is awesome. “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” And Martha then went told Mary, got Mary, brought Mary back to Jesus. And that's when Jesus asked, “where have you laid him?” And that's when they take Him to the cemetery. They take Him to the grave. That's where we have the shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus wept. He was sorrowful that His dear friend had to experience death. Just as He is sorrowful that all of us has to experience death, but then He gave us foretaste of what is to come. “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus is did.

Those of you who have been to memorial services where I've done or used John 11 and talked about this, why did he say Lazarus come out? Why didn't he just say come out? Because if He said come out, the whole cemetery would have emptied. But I think there is a powerful lesson here that we can learn. On Judgment Day it says that Jesus will come, the clouds will be split, the sky will be rolled back, the trumpet will sound, and He will come with a voice or a shout of command. And it's all written in the singular. What's the command? I think it is “Come out” or “rise.” He's not going to use names this time. Everyone is going to rise! Because He is the great I AM. Just like Martha said.

In His Name, Amen.