

Ezekiel 37:12-14

Romans 8:8-11

Gospel of John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

The sisters of Lazarus sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 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." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

*When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, **"I am the resurrection and the life.** Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."*

Jesus was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 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." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 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." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

This Gospel story presents a scene which is becoming all too familiar as we age,
people weeping at the death of a loved one.

Death is like winter – only much worse!
In nature's winter, despite appearances to the contrary, life doesn't cease.
It merely goes underground.
The outward dies, but not at the core.

But in the winter of death, life seems to cease completely.
Death seems to rob us of everything!

When Lazarus died, his sisters Martha and Mary, began to grieve, and grieve deeply!
Jesus went to be with them and to share in their grief.

He was so overcome with sorrow, that he broke down!
This act of breaking down tells us more about his heartfelt sympathy,
than words could ever convey.

But Jesus went further...He brought the assurance that
HE IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.
Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.
And he asked them if they believed this.

Martha said, "I believe that you are the Anointed One, the Son of God,
the one coming into the world."

It must have been very hard for them to believe at that particular moment,
when all evidence pointed toward the contrary.
Just like it is in our day of scientific proof,
a global Coronavirus pandemic and financial insecurity, faith is not easy.

Death often is the most severe test of our faith.

I don't need to give you any examples,
we all have too many to choose from in our life experience.

By Christ saying that he was the resurrection and the life,
he is saying that he holds the key to life and death.

Though he experienced the winter of death,
by rising from the dead in our mortal humanity,
he broke the power of death FOREVER!!
He descended into the darkest kingdom of death [hell, itself]
and then emerged VICTORIOUS.

He laid down the path for us to follow to eternal life.
All we have to do is to fervently follow Him.

He has caused a new and invincible spring to dawn on all who believe in him.

As winter began, a few months ago,
and we sometimes felt the sting of the bitter wind on our faces,
it was really difficult to believe in SPRING.

In the same way,
we are sad when the winter of death claims someone dear and close to our hearts.

We can also become despondent
when more and more of friends and acquaintances also die,
which causes greater focus on our own eventual physical death.

We will not be overwhelmed if we continue to hold on to
the blessed assurance of Jesus,
the resurrection and the life.

Just as the expectation of spring takes the sting out of winter,
so the resurrection of Jesus takes the sting out of death.

Eternal life is not something that begins when we die.

It begins the moment we hear the voice of Christ
and believe in Him,
and follow Him closely.