**2022 Easter Sunday Message**

**“LAZARUS, COME OUT!”**

John 11:25-44

Key Verse: 11:43

“When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’”

Happy Easter! *“Christ is risen!”* Last weekend, we had a wonderful Spring Retreat at the beautiful Spruce Lake, PA. Through the study of 1 Corinthians 15, we are reminded that we are no longer the victims of sin and death but the victors in Christ Jesus. Just as Christ rose from the dead, we will also rise from death when he returns in his glory.

After the refreshing retreat, however, I felt tired and uneasy. I thought that I would feel better if I rested for a while. But I was feeling good. While preparing for this sermon, I realized I was lying in the grave, controlled mainly by a grumpy spirit (Pic#1). I needed to hear the voice of the Lord, “Hey, you grumpy guy, come out of your tomb!” Now, I am not grumpy but very thankful. I will share later how I overcome my grumpiness at the end of my sermon. Anyway, on this Easter Sunday morning, let us think about how we can come out of the tomb and live our day-to-day life in Christ Jesus.

Look at verses 25-26. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” Jesus said these words to Martha, the sister of Lazarus. Martha was upset with Jesus because Jesus didn’t come to heal her brother immediately. Instead, he came after his brother died and was in the tomb for four days. Yet, Jesus told her that her brother would rise again, to which she responded by saying, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Even though what Martha believed about the resurrection on the last day was theologically sound, Jesus wanted to teach her more than the theological aspect of the resurrection. The resurrection life is not just a futuristic thing but a reality here and now through Christ Jesus.

Of course, Jesus didn’t mean that those who believed in him would not experience physical death. What Jesus meant is spiritual death, which is “a separation from God” and thus remaining in the power of darkness. In Genesis 2:16-17, God said to the first man Adam, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will certainly die.” I thought that we die physically because of sin based on Gen. 2:16-17. But when God said to Adam, “you will certainly die,” he meant spiritual death, a separation from God. Adam and Eve didn’t die immediately after the fall. Instead, Adam lived 930 years (Gen. 5:5). Many people are afraid of death or dying physically as if physical death is a curse. Physical death is not something that we can avoid. It’s a necessary process. We should be concerned more about spiritual death, being in the darkness, and having no light in life.

The good news is that those who believe in Jesus will not taste spiritual death. Their spiritual life is restored, and they can be fully alive in Christ Jesus. That’s what he meant when he said that he is the resurrection and the life. Let’s read verses 25 and 26 again. “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” It’s an incredible truth of the gospel that there is no spiritual death for those who believe in Christ. However, the sad thing is that many people, including us who claim to be Christians, often live in the power of darkness.

Why? It’s because of the lack of faith in Christ Jesus. I would say because of spiritual ignorance. Look at verse 27. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’” Again, we see that Martha’s confession was theologically correct. Yet, that wasn’t enough to overcome the power of death in her life. She was theologically sound but spiritually ignorant.

In verses 28-37, we see that Jesus met Mary, Martha’s sister, and those who came to comfort them. Look at verses 28-32. “After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside, ‘The Teacher is here,’ she said, ‘and is asking for you.’ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’” What Mary had said to Jesus was precisely the same as Martha's. “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (11:21) Mary and Marth dearly loved Jesus, and they knew Jesus also loved them dearly (11:1-3). Yet, they were deeply troubled by the death of their brother Lazarus at a young age. After all, they also felt disappointed by Jesus, who didn’t come there early enough to heal their brother. What a disappointment they experienced. So, both of them complained to Jesus politely, saying, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” And they wept in disappointment.

We become angry and sad when our expectations are not met, and when we feel mistreated by someone we trusted. It’s hard to overcome the feelings of rejection, distrust, and betrayal. As I grew up in Korea, sons were preferred to daughters, especially after having many daughters. One of my female classmates in the elementary school had the name “*Kkeut-soonie (끝순이),”* which means “end of girls” or “no more girls.” I could tell her parents' disappointment. But what about the girl who was always called “Kkeut-soonie.” She might have thought that her life was a mistake, and she felt ashamed of her existence. ***“Identity crisis.”*** It must have been too much for a little girl to carry that burden of sadness, rejection, and disappointment. I know she is not alone. Many people are carrying painful emotional baggage all their life.

We often question ourselves, *“Why am I not as gifted as others? Why am I not as successful as others?”* Of course, we are not supposed to compare with others. But we do and become sad and angry. It seems that life is unfair. Not all of us may react in anger. Some may be able to bury it for a while, hiding the heavy and painful emotional memories. Yet, we cannot carry them too far. They are doomed to come out sometime unexpectedly when we are vulnerable and weak mentally. They snap at some point. So, we need to dig deep and dismantle emotional land mines inside of us before they break us to be fully alive Christ Jesus.

Unresolved emotional baggage from the past is more severe than we think. Becoming a new creation in Christ does not mean forgetting or ignoring history. We were touched by the two life testimonies shared by Msn. William and Joseph because they honestly reviewed their lives. We could see how the grace of Christ set them free when they dug deep into their emotional baggage and brought it to the Lord.

Look at verse 33. “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” Jesus’ first reaction toward their weeping was that he was deeply moved and troubled. The phrase **“deeply moved**" in Greek is **“*enebrimesato,****”* meaning “intensely agitated” or “angered.” Angered about what? It does not mean that Jesus was angry with the weeping people. Instead, he was deeply troubled by people’s limitations or spiritual ignorance. Jesus was agitated by the overpowering sense of hopelessness and bitterness of people before the power of physical death.

Some Scripture verses describe physical death as the ultimate enemy of humankind (1 Cor. 15:26). Yet, physical death isn’t our ultimate enemy. It’s a process of life. Jesus compared physical death to sleep, resting from turmoils and pains in this age (Mk. 5:39; 1 Cor. 15:6, 20, 51). It is nice to relax after toils and pains in life. So, some people even said, ***“Physical death is a gift of God.***” Our real enemy is spiritual death, a separation from God. In Christ Jesus, there is no death because we are reconnected to the living God and can have everlasting life.

Look at verses 34-39. “Where have you laid in him,’ he asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ the replied. Jesus wept. Then 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?’ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘Take away the stone,’ he said, ‘But, Lord,’ said Martha, the sister of the dead man, ‘by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.’” As Jesus and people approached the tomb, they could smell something. It was the smell of death, a disgusting smell of a dead body smearing out of the grave. And Jesus wanted to raise Lazarus from death. So standing in front of the tomb, he commanded them to remove the stone from the entrance.

But Martha, not knowing what Jesus was going to do, interrupted Jesus, saying, *“No, no, no, please, Lord! Don’t you smell death? If you try to resuscitate him, it’s too late.”* Like Martha, we often harden our hearts due to misunderstanding and ignorance. But we must remove the stone of unbelief from our hearts to experience God’s power and his leading in our lives.

What did Jesus do? Look at verse 40. “Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’” Jesus didn’t actually say to her, “If you believe, you will see the glory of God.” But he did say to her earlier, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” (11:25,26) Jesus highlighted the importance of our faith in him in our day-to-day life. Our faith in Jesus is not just accepting the theological doctrine of the resurrection. It is to be personally united with Christ, like a marriage relationship between Christ and us. Being legally married is not enough. We should live with him moment by moment, both in good and bad times. The Christian life may not always be smooth but messy from time to time due to our shortcomings and challenges in life. Yet we should never divorce from Christ. We should remain united with Christ.

Christ, the Son of God, became a man to be with us now and forever and give us everlasting life. We may try to do many things, but our priority is to always remain in him, and he remains in us. That’s what it means to believe. It reminds us of what he said to his followers. First, Jesus said in John 6:29, “The work of God is this; to believe the one he has sent.” In John 6:35 and 53-55, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drins my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink.” We need to eat Jesus’ body and drink his blood every day to be spiritually healthy. That’s the work of God.

Look at verses 41 and 42. “So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’” Jesus didn’t have to pray to raise the dead man Lazarus. Yet, he did pray in front of everyone so that people may believe that he was the one whom God had sent, the Messiah.

Look at verse 43. “When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’” Most of us believe that Jesus was able to raise the dead. But the people who gathered there, including Mary, Martha, the Jews, and even his followers, were clueless. Lazarus’ body was decaying with the terrible smell of death. Everyone there probably felt like being buried in the tomb of Lazarus. So when Jesus cried out, “Lazarus, come out!” most of them thought it was a ridiculous thing to say. But what happened? Look at verse 44. “The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’” What an incredible miracle it was!

What lesson should we take from this passage? Even though we are not physically dead, we can identify ourselves with Lazarus lying dead in the tomb or with those who gathered there helplessly in sorrow, overcome by the power of death. But this event demonstrates that death has no control over us in Christ Jesus. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. So whoever believes in Jesus will never die even though they physically die. And whoever lives by believing in him will never die.

As I mentioned earlier, I admit to acting like a grumpy older man from time to time, even after the retreat. Of course, I was thankful for God’s blessing through beautiful messages and other programs during the retreat. At first, I thought I was cranky because of my tiredness. Then I realized a deeper reason for my grumpiness. In my subconsciousness, I had a sense of entitlement that I deserved certain blessings, recognition, and comfort, especially in my older age. I became grumpy and disgraceful as long as I held on to this sense of entitlement. So I immediately repented the sense of entitlement, and God restored the joy and peace in my heart. I became fully alive again. Thank God.

As God’s children, we are supposed to experience fresh and new life through Christ Jesus. If not, we must know that something might block our hearts and make them like a tomb with the smell of death. Some of us might still hold grudges against someone, not letting that person go free. Some might remain in self-pity, thinking they are the everlasting victims and losers. Others might try to save their reputation rather than following God’s way and truth. Some harden their hearts not to be hurt again. No matter the good reasons we might have, we can only smell death within us when we don’t allow the life of Jesus to enter our hearts. We may not be aware of the death smell in us. Or we might be in denial. But God knows it, and people around us also know it. God does not want any of his children to remain victims but for everyone to be victors. We need to recognize the stone that blocks us from having true life in Christ Jesus. We need to remove the stone from our hearts and come out of the tomb. May the blessing of the resurrection of Christ be with you day by day! ***Happy Easter! Christ is risen!***