**John 11:1-45 (ESV)**

“The March For Life”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. God’s love in Christ is for every culture because in every culture people die. Before the earliest Christians witnessed the Gospel. The Greco-Roman world had its own distinctions between death and life. For instance, the place where people were buried was called a, “Necropolis.” A Greek word meaning “city of the dead.” This was an extensive and elaborate place separate from the city of the living. Christians burying the baptized brought a new term into these cities of the dead. Instead of a wide chasm between life and death. The places where those who died in Jesus Christ were called *κοιμητήριον or* “sleeping place.” You still use the term today whenever you say the word, “Cemetery.”

As much as Lent marches into death. It truly is a march toward life. The Gospel reading according to John draws us closer to the victory in Jesus. Death and life have no distinction in Him. As St. Paul said, “For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Romans 14:9). Rather than wondering over all that stands in-between death and life. The questions are to turn into the confession we faithfully make of Christ. He alone has come to stand in-between the grief for the Father has given us His Son. A week before His own suffering and death on the cross. Jesus provides the last and greatest miracle for men. Raising Lazarus witnessed against sin, death, and the Devil. The Savior marches to life with good news. He calls us out of our tombs of reluctance, frustration, and hopelessness.

Having just escaped a near death experience with the Pharisees in Jerusalem. The disciples were far from eager to go back any time soon. They heard the announcement about Lazarus being very sick in Bethany. They heard Jesus’ response promising the outcome would be “for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Similar words were also said by Jesus concerning the blind man that now could see. However, after two days of waiting, the disciples were not ready when the time came. Their reaction to going back to Judea brought reluctance. They were unwilling to place Jesus, or themselves, in danger again. How quickly did their hearts become cold like a tomb. It lead them to misinterpret the savior’s words about Lazarus falling asleep. Before Jesus would deal with the physical death of Lazarus. He had to speak life into the dead hearts of His own disciples. Jesus told them plainly, "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."

How often does reluctance get in the way of the baptized. It is that unwillingness standing against the will of the Lord. What is the will of the Lord? It is to go toward those dangerous situations just like Jesus heading back in the direction of Jerusalem. The tombs of our hearts easily grow cold because sinners care only about ourselves. St. Paul said in the Epistle reading, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” The only way for the church to walk forward as that community in Christ is to live by our united promise in baptism. It is to be bold to turn away from what is easy in life so the despairing and weak can have hope in Jesus. Only the good news of Jesus will help to change these reluctant hearts. He says, “If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." The Word stands as a promise against everything that seems so risky. Christ calls us out of our tombs to turn and follow His way. The miracle of Lazarus teaches us nothing will threaten the lives of those who trust in God’s Son, the saving Word.

Of course, as the disciples would find out. Life was what already came crashing down upon Mary and Martha. So painful was the death of Lazarus many came out to the small town to comfort them. Who knows the sickness, but surely it must have been painful to see. Both women were in a tomb of frustration. They cried out to Jesus who came so late, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Yet, there was something different. The work-alcoholic Martha was bolder than her sister Mary! She said, “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." In the worst situation when works failed. When there was only frustration. Martha had learned to stand upon Jesus. He challenged her to see how far she was going to confess Him as the Savior. There would be no budging for she said, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." It was upon this Word that Martha was able to tell Mary the Teacher “is calling for you.” The personal touch pulled her out from the death-ridden tomb of that home. She could shed her tears before Jesus. He shows compassion to the brokenhearted. His question promised to carry the weight of her pain declaring, “Where have you laid Him?”

Little surprise frustration abounds in our world. We can do many things and work many wonders. Yet, death lashes out all the same. Disease, accidents, and many other things take life. Just look how much grief came out of nowhere for those on 9/11. Who can explain why the good ones get swept away right along with the bad ones. People cry out to God and despise His ways. It is the result of believing works justify, works make the difference, but not with death. St. Paul told us, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.” Rather than boasting in works, Christ calls us out of these torturous tombs. At every funeral people hear part of this Gospel reading from John. It is not for the dead, but for the living. The pastor proclaims, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” Instead of frustration, Christ blesses us to have faith in Him. How fitting that the shortest verse in the Bible is “Jesus wept.” He cries over the deaths of those who die in His Name. The Psalmist stated, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15)

As Jesus drew closer to the lonely death of Lazarus. His march of life grew with people by His life giving Spirit of the Gospel. At the sight of the tomb. The agonizing pain fell upon Him again. It was the judgment that would fall upon God’s Son at the cross a week later. How much did He identify with the finality of human life. The Devil made death appear so hopeless and barren. Christ took His place as that mediator between the chasm of death and life. He prayed, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” Many were astonished over how easily Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It was almost as if He greeted the dead man in the same way as if he were alive. The only hopelessness for sinners was not to hope in Him.

What appears so far apart the Savior has swallowed up. His suffering and death filled in the chasm made by sin, death, and the Devil. Christ greets the baptized in life by His Word and Sacrament. It is with this same grace He greets those who die in Him. It is the greeting that calls us out of the grave with new bodily life on the Las Day. The earliest Christians proclaimed a peaceful rest at the cemetery. It challenged a culture that only saw a city of death. As one apologist writes,

“All evidence of the New Testament goes to show that the burden of the good news or gospel was not ‘Follow this Teacher and do your best,’ but, ‘Jesus and the Resurrection.’ You cannot take that away from Christianity without radically altering its character and destroying its very identity” (New Evidence, 207).

The church has a better witness in death than it could ever give in life. Jesus calls us out of the tombs of reluctance, frustration, and hopelessness for it is a march of life with Him. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.