

**SERMON: "THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE"**  
**TEXT: NEW TESTAMENT JOHN 11:17-44**

**March 22, 2026**

**Dr. Dave Kivett**

## **INTRODUCTION**

It was the day of a funeral here at church. It may have been my first funeral here.  
It was about an hour or two before the service, the funeral home people were here.  
I went down the hall to the bathroom. When I walked back through the commons  
to my office ... There was a casket, open, the deceased laying there.  
Got to admit ... it was bit of a shock.

My first thought was ... "So that is how they do things around here."  
Having been in ministry for almost four decades and in four different states,  
I have seen and I have learned that there are many ways people do funerals  
Many ways and many places – the funeral home, the church, the grave

Used to be the common practice was to do the service at the church  
then do a brief committal service at the grave.  
Maybe do the whole service there, a graveside service  
Those services so often seemed to end on a note of sadness  
Family holding on and holding on to each other at the grave

The emerging trend of late (especially with more and more families choosing cremation)  
is to have the service at the church, celebrate resurrection. First with a service  
that speaks to that person's life and to the gift of life eternal. Then with a  
reception after the service with snacks and stories round the tables  
I have often encouraged families to do it that way. An upbeat ending

Lately, my thoughts have been challenged by the work Tom Long has done on funerals  
He argues that we may have gone too far from the grave  
Example. We don't talk really about death. We say someone has 'passed.'

Long's assertion is that should celebrate resurrection all over the place  
He advocates taking that celebration from the church and out, back to the grave  
especially for churches that have graveyards or memorial gardens  
Take the good news to grave, talk back to death  
Don't mask the pain. Don't pretend it doesn't hurt

That is what happened when Jesus went to his friend Lazarus' house after he died  
That is the context of Jesus' conversation with Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha  
Jesus' statement, "**I am the resurrection and the life**" is spoken here  
in the shadow of death ... at a funeral, or maybe it was a wake.  
It is spoken in the midst of and directly to the sadness.

## QUESTION & ANSWER

Today's Scripture lesson lets us know that Jesus loved his friend Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. He loved his friend so much and was so moved that he wept. The shortest verse of Scripture is one that sticks with us, "Jesus wept."

We remember that much, that Jesus wept. That is comforting. Jesus weeps like we do. Jesus wept because he loved Lazarus. How does a God who weeps deal with our tears? The question is asked by both Martha and Mary, who confront Jesus and let him know how they feel, **"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."**

Jesus got the news before Lazarus died. He could have come earlier, but he didn't! Why didn't he come earlier and keep Lazarus from dying in the first place? Why did Jesus wait like that? Why does God let bad things happen?

The first time I preached on this passage, back in Kentucky, was the week I learned that a young man who used to be in my youth group, Roger, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He was 24 years old when he got the news. He was 24 years old when he died. I did his funeral.

Two weeks after the doctor told my friend Roger that he was terminal, at a follow up appointment, she asked him a straightforward question. "Do you believe in God?" His honest answer was, "Yes, I do ... but I'm really mad with him right now."

That is a good answer. At one time or another we've all been or will be upset with God probably for the same reason, asking the same question ... "Why, O God, did you let this happen? How could you let something like this happen?"

That is the same basic question Martha and Mary asked of Jesus; the same question asked by Roger, his friends and his family; the same question asked by the saints who have suffered struggled through and survived heart breaking, tear-making loss.

It is a question that cannot be answered easily. The Scripture lesson this morning provides an answer.

**So the sisters sent word 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 Man may be glorified."**

Lazarus' death provides Jesus an opportunity to show the people who he is. That's probably why he stayed where he was for two days before going to be sure that Lazarus is dead and buried so that there can be no rebuttals or rationalizations of what Jesus will do like, "He wasn't really dead, he was asleep or unconscious or in a coma."

## GLORY IN A GRAVEYARD

The onlookers issue a challenge to Jesus talking amongst themselves after they see him weeping for his friend, **“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”** (John 11:37)

With his actions Jesus answers their query by showing them that not only is he capable of preventing death, he is capable of defeating it. With the raising of Lazarus, God is glorified as Jesus lets the people know that he himself is God, that he has power over life and death.

Lazarus dies and is resurrected in order that God might be glorified. This will set the scene for what is to come – Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through him, the same will be true with all God’s people, our death and resurrection. Every funeral service, every memorial service, is an opportunity to glorify God by witnessing to the resurrection and God’s victory over death.

God is glorified whenever people of faith dare to look to and beyond the grave and put their trust, their hope, their confidence, their faith in the One who himself rose again from the dead so that all God’s people might share in that victory with him.

Let me be clear about that ... God is not glorified in death, God is glorified in the victory over death that is the resurrection. The death of a loved one is always painful no matter their age or health.

Saying goodbye is never easy. We wish that God would prevent death, that we would have longer with those we love. That longing lay behind Martha’s words to Jesus, as Jesus words to her, his ‘I am statement’.

**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?”**

The way she puts the question lets you know her answer is “Yes, I believe.” She will say it ... and then see it for herself when her brother Lazarus is raised.

I don’t really remember Jesus making any of his other “I am” statements I am the bread of life. I am the good shepherd, etc. All of which are in John’s gospel ... and then asking a question. But here he does. Guess that’s because this is the most central of questions. He is asking us if we believe, put our trust, our faith, in the resurrection, through him

## SUMMARY

The answer is yes ... a big resounding yes. It is a yes that may be whispered through tears or shouted back by a young man dying of cancer who has good reason to be angry with God. It is a yes spoken without words but with hands holding the hand of a loved one breathing their last breath. It is yes that dares to talk back to the darkness, talk back to death.

It is a yes heard in homes and hospitals ... and in graveyards.  
It is the 'yes' that changes everything, changes how we look at the world  
It is the good news that shapes how we look at, and deal with, the bad news.  
It is the yes that puts all the no's into proper perspective

I'm pretty sure I told you before about the church I served as an interim pastor before being called here. It's a great church in a great town, Chattanooga, TN. I felt called there like I felt called here, like I feel called to go back to interim ministry as Beth and I head home to North Carolina this summer.

The interview with them was going well. I could feel the momentum building  
Then right at the end Clay added, "Oh, and we have an Easter Sunrise service, the oldest ongoing sunrise service in the city." I admit it now. That slowed the momentum for me just a bit – a sunrise service (I'm no early bird). Ugh.  
At least it wasn't a live nativity. That would have been a deal breaker.

Wasn't too thrilled about the sunrise service. But then I found out more about it  
Enough to rather like it (but not enough to suggest we do the same here, too late)  
Here's what I like about it. They don't do the Easter Sunrise service at the church  
They do it in the city cemetery not far from the church

What a great place to say, "Yes, I believe in the resurrection!"