

Title: This changes everything
Text: John 11.1-53
Theme: I AM the resurrection and the life
Occasion: Chinese students visit – Nov. 2017
Prop Stmtnt: The resurrection of Lazarus proved the right of Christ to make his claims and to call us to believe in him.

This morning I want to extend a warm welcome to our guests from China and give you, our guests, an explanation of what I am about to do. Every Sunday, we who publicly and personally profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, gather together in order to worship God. We do this by singing to God and to one another about God. We worship God by praying to him. We worship God by giving of our time to serve, encourage one another, by giving our money to support our church and all that our church does as well as funding people to go all over the world to tell others about Jesus Christ. We worship God by studying the Bible, by teaching it, reading it and discussing it with one another. Therefore, when we come together as a group of Jesus Christ followers we are a local church that seeks to honor God by helping others become followers of Jesus Christ and by helping those who are followers of Jesus Christ, follow him better.

This is often called “Christianity.” Christianity is a single thing made up of several essential parts. For example, let’s say that you are studying Chemistry. You learn that sulphuric acid is two parts hydrogen, 1 part sulphur and 4 parts oxygen. However, sulphuric acid is not two parts hydrogen, one part sulphur, and four parts of oxygen all put together in a jar and then all mixed up together. Sulphuric acid is one thing that is comprised of these 3 elements in a way that it is different than its parts. Sulphuric acid is different than hydrogen, different than sulphur and different than oxygen. The same thing is true of Christianity. It is basically one thing that is made up of four parts. I call those four parts: Historical events, Interpretation, Personal belief, and Congregational life.

- Historical Events

Christianity is based on actual events in history that God has done. For example, Jesus Christ lived on this earth 2,000 years ago. Around the age of 30 he began to go throughout his home country of Israel teaching people who would listen to him, performing some miracles and training a small group of men who were known as the disciples. Jesus also died. He was executed as a public criminal. But after he died, he rose again from the dead. Those are historical events. But Christianity is more than that.

- Interpretation

How are we to understand those events? What is the meaning and the significance of those events? Why did Jesus live on this earth? Why did he die? What happened as a result of his death? Why does this matter? People die all the time. In fact people are executed as criminals all the time. Does it really matter? How we interpret those events is called doctrine. Doctrine means the truths that we believe and study. Christianity is properly defined by truths that are the proper interpretation of these historical events.

Now, it is obvious that not every holds to the same interpretation as we do about these events which is another way of saying, not everybody believes as we do. We understand that, because none of us used to believe this either. But we do now. Which leads to the 3rd component of Christianity:

- Personal Belief

Christianity is more than a collection of historical events with a particular interpretation. Christianity is comprised of people who believe that particular interpretation and commit their life to it. These truths about Christ affect us deeply. If you know someone who is a Christ-follower (or claims at some level to be one), then your understanding of Christianity is going to be shaped by how this person influences your life. If their life appears to have joy, hope, peace, love, kindness, and goodness, then you might be interested or at least intrigued. You might be curious as to why they are this way. You might wonder, if they are really this way, or if they are only pretending to be this way. On the other hand, if the person who claims to follow Christ is a jerk or is pretty messed up, then you are probably not going to be interested in investigating Christianity. If you come from a family that is demanding, harsh, angry, and no matter what you do, you feel as if you are never good enough, maybe your home is even violent, or broken, you probably have made up your mind that you do not want to be that way and that if you ever have a family you don't want it to be like that, but you may not know how to change that. If you meet a family who are Christ followers and you spend time with them and you witness the fact that they really love each other, and you witness the fact that they are, for the most part patient with each other and really enjoy one another, again, you may be curious, perhaps even motivated to look more deeply into what they believe because it is obvious to you that their lives are not what you are used to, but there is something attractive, maybe even compelling about them. But, we are more than individuals who believe certain truths about God and what he has done in history and has promised to do for us, we are...

- Congregations

We are a people who because of our commitment to God are committed to care for another and help one another, serve one another and love one another as ways of expressing our love for God. Because we love God, we love whom he loves. We have voluntarily and happily joined ourselves together as members of this congregation in order to help one another follow Jesus better. And together, we are so much more than what we are as individuals.

So, this morning, I am going to read an account from the Bible that tells us about an event that happened in the life of Christ. I am going to talk about how we are to understand this (that is interpret it), meaning what we are to believe about it, and how that affects our lives as followers of Christ and how that affects us together as a congregation. If you listen to us over time and watch our lives, you will come to know that what we believe is not simply a tradition that we follow because we were raised this way. This is profoundly personal to us and while we cannot make anyone believe as we do, we certainly invite

people to examine what we call the Christian faith. The account that we are looking at today is from a book in the Bible called John because it was written by a man named John, who was one of the eyewitnesses of the life of Christ and was one of his disciples. The book of John is a collection of stories about the life of Christ while he was on earth. Close to the end of the book, John tells us why he wrote the book, which is a good example of what I have been attempting to explain to you.

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20.30-31

“but these are written” – Historical events (things that God has done)

“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” – Interpretation

“and that by believing you may have life in his name” – Personal Belief

Therefore, the account that we are going to be looking at this morning tells us about one of those historical events. That event happened and that event demands interpretation. There is a right way to interpret and a wrong way. The right way to understand the event is very evident in the story. The wrong way to understand the event is also pointed out in this account.

John 11.1-53

1. **God is always doing more than what you and I realize.** (1-16)

Now, this is not the main point of the story, but it certainly helps to set-up and point to the main point of the story. The fact that God is always doing more than what you and I realize, means that we are always going to be in a place of wonder and dependence. Wonder and dependence are expressions of faith when in the moment everything that we know does not make complete sense. There is always more to the story than what we know. For example, take the issue of timing.

A. The issue of timing

It is very interesting to note the emphasis that John places on the affection that Jesus had with this family. Mary deeply appreciated Christ. She certainly believed the things that he said about himself and she and her sister Martha and their brother Lazarus were known to be a family that Jesus spent time with. They loved him and he loved them.

It is also interesting to note that in spite of how much Jesus loved them and how much he knew that they loved him, that when he heard about how sick Lazarus was, Jesus did not immediately rush to his side. In fact, we read in verse 6, that when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed away for 2 more days. In the moment, while the disciples

may have wondered why, the fact that Jesus had said that “*This illness does not lead to death...*” probably put their minds at ease.

So, when, several days later, they all get to Bethany and find out that Lazarus had been buried now for four days, we can understand the confusion on the part of the sisters, both of whom said to Jesus that if you had been here he would not have died. I think it is safe to say that the disciples were probably wondering the same thing. Jesus deliberately waited before he went to Bethany.

If you had a friend who was in the hospital and was dying and you heard about it and instead of going to see your friend you chose to wash your car, update your Facebook account with some pictures of you going shopping, get a manicure, go camping, go for a bike ride, play a few video games, etc., and after a few days you made it over to the hospital, only to find out that he not only died, but that the funeral was held yesterday and you missed the whole thing, people would have reason to think that you were not a very good friend. So, obviously, people did not know what to do with what they knew at this point. Related to that is how Jesus talks about death.

B. The issue of “death”

When I read this account, I can imagine that some of the disciples just wanted to run their heads through a stone wall. I mean, Jesus does sound more than a bit confusing here doesn't he? When they first learn that Lazarus is sick Jesus said that “*this illness does not lead to death.*” How would you understand that? Hey, the guy is sick, but he is going to get better. But, he doesn't get better and after a couple of days Jesus says that they now need to go to Bethany (which was risky) because Lazarus had died. It's like, well, wait a minute! You first said that he wasn't going to die and now you say that he died. I don't get that! What is it?! Now, obviously what Jesus was trying to teach them was that this illness would not ultimately result in his death but in something greater and that something greater was the glory of God and the glory of the Son of God being put on display. But, in the moment they were rightfully confused. They had no idea what Jesus was about to do. They had no idea of how all of this was going to fit in Christ's purpose for coming to the earth. In the moment all that they knew was that what Jesus said did not seem to make sense and it didn't make sense because they did not know everything that Jesus knew. God is always doing more than what you and I realize. Therefore we are called to respond with wonder and dependency.

2. Jesus makes promises that only God can keep. (17-27)

In these verses Jesus tells us how we are supposed to understand this event, even before he performs the main act. Again, Jesus had power they had never witnessed before. He healed all sorts of people. He healed people who appeared to be complete strangers. So, if Jesus healed complete strangers then one would assume that he would heal someone whom he knew well. Besides, Jesus was the most loving person they had ever met. He loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and yet Jesus did not immediately do anything when he

found out that Lazarus was sick and now Lazarus had died and Jesus is obviously grieving but he is not apologizing for not getting there earlier.

So, obviously, Mary and Martha are disappointed at the very least in Jesus. It is quite possible that Lazarus, their brother provided the income for them and with him being dead, they not only grieved the loss of their brother, but they had no idea now of what was going to happen to them. And where was Jesus? So now he shows up and tells Martha that Lazarus will rise again. Martha's response is actually quite remarkable. She expresses her disappointment and yet she expresses faith. "*BUT (in spite of this) even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.*" That is wonder and dependence. It is at this moment that Jesus makes an enormous promise to her. He says, "*Your brother will rise again.*"

Martha tries to qualify and temper what Jesus says by assuring Jesus that she believes in the final resurrection of all on the last day in the end of history. But, while that is true, Jesus has something else in mind for Lazarus right now. I am assuming that he fixes his eyes upon Martha's in a way that not only locks her vision in, but seemingly enables her to see inside his soul even as he speaks to hers and he says, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" That resurrection that you believe in, that's me! I am the power of that. I am the reason for that. "*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.*"

Wow!!! That is a bold statement. In fact, bold is not a strong enough word for that. This is a bodacious statement. Well, it is bodacious if it is true, if Jesus can do what he promised. But, think of the risk. Martha is probably at the most vulnerable point in her life. It looks as if Jesus has already disappointed her and he now calls her to believe in him and he claims to be the resurrection and the life. Only God can make that claim. And Martha gets it! She realizes, she understands who and what Jesus is claiming to be. And in the midst of her loss, in the midst of her wonder, in the midst of her grief she expresses faith in Christ. Her response is exactly what Christ is looking for. This woman, this vulnerable, grieving, single woman gets what the rich, powerful, ruling elite men do not get. She gets it and expresses it. "*Yes Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*"

3. **Jesus will always keep his promises.** (28-44)

John is a masterful storywriter. The account itself is powerful, but John points out details that just draw us in. Martha's expression of faith is now expressed in her eagerness to go tell her sister Mary that Jesus was there. I read verse 28 and I just smile. In Luke 10, Jesus had earlier visited the home of Mary and Martha and while Mary was listening intently to Jesus as he taught, Martha was distracted by all of the details of getting things in order for company and is really frustrated that Mary is not helping her like she should and finally blurts out to Jesus, can't you see that I'm left all alone trying to get things ready? Tell Mary to help me out – this isn't fair! And Jesus tells Martha that actually Mary is doing what she ought to be doing. She needs to listen to Jesus. So, here we are now in this scene and what is Martha doing? She is listening to Jesus isn't she? And not

only that but she is believing him and now she is the one who goes and gets Mary so that Mary can hear what Martha has heard. And what happens? Mary goes and the first thing she says is the same thing that Martha said, right? And I think that Martha just smiled.

A. He is compassionate (28-37)

Jesus apparently does not defend himself to Mary. In fact, this text really emphasizes the compassion of Christ. He is deeply moved in his spirit as he sees her weeping and as he sees the others weeping. The fact that he is God and the fact that he is all-powerful and the fact that he is about to perform one of his most notable miracles does not rob him of the ability to be completely in the moment and be fully engaged in this event with all of its tension and emotion. Christ is not put off by our tears. He sheds them with us. That is incredible. What makes it incredible is not the fact that there is someone who will weep with you, because there are some people who will do that. Christ is more than someone who will weep with you. Christ will raise the dead!

B. He is all-powerful.

If you have power over death, you have ultimate power. That is why I entitled this sermon: This changes everything, because if this is true, that Christ is the resurrection and the life and he is able to raise the dead, then this really does change everything. So, Christ along with Mary and Martha go to the tomb where Lazarus is buried and he orders the stone to be removed. This is bold! And Martha is more than a bit concerned, right? Are you sure about this? It's been 4 days and those spices only last so long, this isn't going to be pretty. Have you ever smelled death? You won't forget it? Have you ever seen someone rise again from the dead? You won't forget that either. And after assuring Martha that her faith is well placed he prays and calls Lazarus to come out. And he does. But, this event, as incredible as it is, pointed to his own resurrection a short while later.

4. What Jesus says and does demands a response. (45-53)

Do you realize what this is about? This is more than just raw power. You have to think deeper. In order to have power over life itself, you have to be God. But there is a related issue. Jesus not only demonstrated power over life, he demonstrated power over death. And here is why this account is so very important. This story is a set-up for what Jesus was about to do. Jesus was about to die. When the religious leaders and the ruling elite heard of what had happened they were threatened because they were afraid that they would lose their positions of power. So, they set out to kill Jesus. What makes you think that you can kill someone who just raised someone from the dead? You can't, unless that person lets you. And that is what Jesus did. He allowed himself to be arrested, charged, found guilty and sentenced to death. And then he died. He died by being crucified on a cross. And in the moment, it made no sense.

But, just like the first point of this sermon, God is always doing more than you and I realize. How could anyone kill Jesus? How did that happen and why did that happen? Well, the truth is, the reason why Jesus is the resurrection and the life is because he has

power over death. Where does death get its power from? Death only gets power from sin. Death is the punishment for sin. Every single one of us is guilty of sinning against God. We are rebels who want to live our own lives, make up our own rules, be our own boss, and do our own thing. That is treason because we have been made by God for the purpose of enjoying God. But we have each rebelled and our rebellion is called sin and the payment for our sin is death. That is serious. We have each rebelled, which means that we are sinners who are deserving of God's punishment. And God would be perfectly just to punish us. But God did something amazing. He came to this earth in the form of Jesus. God became a man and he lived the life that you could not live. He lived a perfect life in your place. And then, he took upon himself the credit, the blame, the shame and the guilt for the sins of every single person who would ever believe on him. And he died for them. He died as a perfect sacrifice in order to completely pay off the penalty for those sins. And since he paid the penalty in full, death no longer had a claim on him, and 3 days after Jesus died, he rose again. Do you believe this?

Imagine that you are diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Your doctor just shakes his head and says, "I'm sorry. I can call hospice for you. I can help make you comfortable, but that's about all I can do." You go to another doctor and get the same response. But, then your neighbor comes over and says, "I know a doctor who can cure you. He cured me." You are desperate and you go. And this doctor after looking at all of your scans, MRI's, x-rays and blood work sits down with you, takes you by the hands and with the most compassionate eyes you have ever seen, says, "I can fix this. I am 100% certain that I can fix this and that you will live. Do you believe me?" He then takes you down the hall and now you see hundreds of pictures of men, women and children celebrating Christmas, celebrating birthdays, celebrating anniversaries and underneath everyone is a note that says, thank-you doctor. This would not be possible without you. In the middle of the hall, you see your neighbor and his family. That would be an amazing doctor, wouldn't it?

Well, there is something infinitely more serious than cancer and that is your sin. But there is someone who can forgive you and cleanse you and declare you righteous. He died for that and his resurrection proved it was real. If you are investigating Christianity, examine the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. If he did not rise again from the dead, then it really doesn't matter whatever he said or did. But, if he did rise again from the dead then everything he said and did does matter.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20.30-31