

“God’s Timing Is Perfect”
John 11:17-27, 38-53
March 26, 2023

How quick are you to believe big promises? I think most of us are probably a little hesitant, a little skeptical to believe every promise we hear. And I’m sure we all know the feeling when you believed in a promise only to have that promise broken. “I promise we will give you a raise next year when business is better,” but the raise never came. “I promise this medication will make you feel better,” but then it doesn’t work and you still feel sick. “I promise, if elected, your taxes will not increase,” but then they go up because something happened that was unexpected.

This morning we see Jesus making some pretty big promises in our Gospel lesson. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Everyone who believes in me shall never die. Believe and you will see the glory of God.” In this text Jesus is at the funeral of his good friend, Lazarus. Martha and Mary, Lazarus’ sisters, were both, understandably filled with grief that their brother had died. But underneath their grief they both still had faith in Jesus’ ability to heal. Each of them came to Jesus separately and said, “If you had been here Lord, my brother would not have died.” Their statement was definitely true. Jesus had healed plenty of sick people, and many others were saying the same thing. In verse 37 it states that some people said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

But then, Martha, made an interesting comment. In verse 22 she said, “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” What did she mean? Did she believe that Jesus might raise Lazarus from the dead? We don’t know, but we do know that in the midst of their grief Martha and Mary still had faith.

Then Jesus makes a promise to Martha. He doesn’t talk about what He could or couldn’t have done. Instead, He says, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha thought that Jesus was

talking about Judgment Day – the day that, in her mind, God the Father would end this sinful world as we know it and raise everyone, physically, from the dead – including Lazarus. While she believed that, it appears, though, as if she did not picture Jesus being the one who would raise people from the dead on Judgment Day – only God the Father. So then Jesus makes another promise to her. He says, “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.”

Now what does Jesus mean that “you will live, even though you die; and whoever lives and believes will never die.” What Jesus was talking about and promising Martha (and all of us) was life – real life – eternal life. He says that He is the source of life for all people. No one lives without Him. No one is saved without Him. What’s interesting is that when many people use the word, “eternal,” they are usually exaggerating. “I waited an eternity for her,” says the husband, explaining why he and his wife were late for dinner. But when Jesus spoke about eternity, it was not a figure of speech. It was straight talk about real life.

However, the way we look at life is often different from the way Jesus describes life. If you were to ask someone, “Do you want to live forever?” They will usually say, “No.” I asked that question of an 87 year-old friend of mine several years ago and he said, “Why would I want to live forever? I’m falling apart as it is with all of my health issues.” So then I asked him, “What if you could be 27 years-old forever and never age?” He said, “27 forever? That would be great.” Well, that, in essence is what Jesus is saying in those promises He makes to Martha and all of us. People often associate eternity with time – a quantity measured in minutes, days, and years. What Jesus is referring to is a quality of life, which involves having a relationship with Him. He’s describing the difference between how He defines life, which is having a relationship with Him, and how He defines death – which is being separated from Him. And that difference is a lot more

meaningful and consequential than the difference between days and years and having a heartbeat. The point that Jesus is making is that life with Him is not just some future event. It is something that we all can experience right now and it never stops. In John 17:3, Jesus is praying to His Heavenly Father as He is about to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and says, “This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Jesus was talking about life as He gives it, with all the quality God intended life to have, filled with joy, grace, and love; and it is enjoyed only in a relationship with Him. “That’s living,” said Jesus. That’s why Paul said, once he became a believer in Jesus, that for him “living is Christ.”

Unfortunately, what many people call “life” today is actually a kind of living death. It is filled with distrust, disappointments, frustrations, and fear. When God is not real to people or when they hold Him off at arm’s length, everything grows old and gradually dies. Love grows cold, relationships break apart, fighting begins, and misunderstandings destroy relationships – which are accompanied by pain, emotional suffering, and devastation of all kinds. In other words, without God there is death and decay all around us. And God hates death.

When Lazarus died, Mary came to Jesus along with several others and they were weeping. Verse 33 says that when Jesus saw this “he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.” And in verse 35 it says that Jesus wept. This was personal to Jesus, even though he knew it was only temporary. He didn’t like what death did to Lazarus. He didn’t like what it did to Mary and Martha and their friends. And He didn’t like what death did to Him. Lazarus was Jesus’ friend and now he was rotting in a grave. This wasn’t natural. It wasn’t the way He created this world to be, so He was going to do something about it.

“Do you believe?” Jesus asked Martha as He made some big promises to her. It can be hard sometimes to believe, such as when we are experiencing grief like Mary and Martha when a

loved one suddenly dies, or when a successful career suddenly ends, or when health is suddenly replaced by illness, or when love is replaced by loneliness, or when good days are replaced by bad ones. I'm sure we've all had moments of doubt, sadness, and grief, wondering if everything we had ever believed about Jesus is actually true. Sometimes when we are faced with some harsh realities of life, promises of God may not seem real. Jesus told Martha to move the stone away from Lazarus' tomb, and she hesitated – being more concerned about the possibility that there might be an odor coming from the tomb. It's interesting how Martha came to Jesus hinting at a miracle, but then as Jesus prepares to do a miracle in bringing Lazarus back to life, Martha isn't so sure. In other words, it appears that Martha prayed for something she didn't really think was going to happen. Her prayer was more like a long shot, but she prayed anyway and had the stone moved away. Jesus then said, "Lazarus, come out" and the dead man came walking out of his tomb. Martha saw Jesus raise her brother from the dead and she believed.

A short while later, during Holy Week, Martha would again experience grief. Instead of her brother dying, she would see Jesus dying on a cross. Instead of burying Lazarus in a tomb, she would be burying Jesus in a tomb. But perhaps for her, another promise of Jesus would echo through her mind, "Believe and you will see the glory of God." And sure enough, just as Lazarus walked out of a tomb, Jesus would walk out of His tomb on Easter morning and reveal to everyone that He is the resurrection and the life.

So who wants to live forever? Well, I certainly do, knowing that Jesus lives for us, forgives us, and wants to have a relationship with us forever. Easter is coming and there Jesus proves to us that all of His promises will come true. In this world we will still have those difficult days like Martha and Mary had, but knowing that Jesus will one day call out our names and we will come out of our graves, just like Lazarus did, physically alive again, healthier and happier than ever,

fills me with great hope. May God grant to all of us the faith that looks to Jesus every day for strength, comfort, and life, and believes in His promises that eternal life is ours today and forever.