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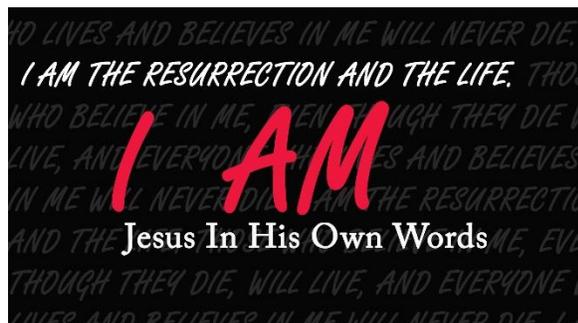
Title: I AM the Resurrection and the Life

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Text: [John 11:17-27](#)

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[Watch the service.](#)



This is week number five as we look at seven statements of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. They are statements about the identity of Jesus, in his own words. We call them the "I AM" statements of Jesus because each one begins with the words, "I AM...." We've considered 'I am the bread of life'; 'I am the light of the world'; 'I am the

gate'; 'I am the good shepherd'; Today is: 'I am the resurrection and the life'; Two left after today - 'I am the way, the truth and the life', and 'I am the vine'.

John's gospel takes the story of the people of God in the Old Testament and connects it to the story of Jesus in the New Testament, claiming that Jesus is the I AM. In the Old Testament, when Moses presses God for a name, God replied with the words "I AM." So, God has a name and that name is "I AM." I've been harping on putting these I AM statements into the context in which they were said. All of these statements were said in response to the situation in which Jesus found himself. He's not just saying picking them out of the blue. He said he was light in the middle of a ceremony of darkness and said he was the good shepherd during a festival where there was much talk about sheep. Today is no different. Jesus says he is resurrection in the middle of a resurrection and says that he is life in the middle of giving someone life. If you get nothing else from this series, I hope you will get that context is important.

Today's identity statement of Jesus in his own words comes from the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. It takes almost the entire 11th chapter of John to tell the whole story. In the interest of time, we only read the part with the "I AM" statement but if you want the story start to finish, read all of John 11. In case you are not familiar with the story, Jesus has been called to come to the house of his friend Lazarus, who is sick. Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha. Scripture specifically indicates that Jesus did not immediately leave to go heal his friend.

Verse six tells us that, "After having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." (John 11:6). I've always wondered why Jesus waited. Why didn't he immediately rush to the bedside of Lazarus? We would have. If someone we love is near death and we get the call, we incline to rush to the bedside. We're not told why Jesus waited but the delay seems to be intentional. Perhaps it was that people already knew that he could heal the sick. What they did not know is that he could raise the dead.

This morning's "I AM" statement comes in a conversation between Jesus and Martha, one of the sisters after Jesus finally arrives on the scene. Lazarus has died. Martha comes out to greet Jesus and immediately laments his delay in coming and scolds him because she knows that he could have saved her brother's life. Their conversation culminates in Jesus saying to Martha, "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?" (John 11:25-26) At that moment, even though Lazarus is still dead, Martha gives her profession of faith. "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." (John 11:27).

In the next scene, Martha has returned to the house to fetch her sister, Mary, who quickly goes out and meets Jesus. Mary falls at his feet and her lament and scolding echoes Martha's. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary weeps. Jesus, later in the chapter, will also weep. By the way, that verse – John 11:35 – is the shortest verse in the entire Bible. It's "Jesus wept" in the King James – "Jesus began to weep" in the translation we use in worship. I know that because, as a kid, our church used to have kids memorize Bible verses. That was always top on my list. Can anyone recite a Bible verse? YES – John 11:35 - but I digress.

In the final scene, long past our reading today, the sisters lead Jesus to the tomb and, after voicing sensible concerns about how long he's been dead and the odor that might go along with that, they remove the stone from the tomb. Jesus calls Lazarus and Lazarus comes out. The story ends with Jesus telling those around to "unbind him and let him go." (John 11:44b). Although some of the bystanders believe, others go and report Jesus to the authorities. Based on this report, the authorities decide definitively to put him to death. The way to the cross and Jesus' tomb starts here where Jesus is lovingly life-giving.¹

With that context of where Jesus finds himself, let's get back to our I AM statement – "I am the resurrection and the life." Does it mean that Jesus immediately raises everyone who dies back to life? Of course not. We know

better. And even Lazarus would eventually die. This demonstration on the part of Jesus shows his power to become who he claims to be. Just like he did not illuminate the whole world when he said he was the light of the world or take care of every herd of sheep when he said he was the good shepherd, he does not raise every dead person when he says – “I am the resurrection and the life.” Instead, it is a vision of what he can do in our lives if we allow him in.



During a summer in England studying religious art and architecture, I did my final paper on the cathedral at Coventry. It is unique because the 13th-century cathedral was bombed in 1940 during World War II. In 1962, a new, modern cathedral was completed but the bombed-out ruins were left intact adjacent to the new structure. The main entrance to the new cathedral leads you first through the roofless ruins of the old nave before entering

the new space. You cannot visit the Coventry Cathedral without being keenly aware of the power of rebirth. This new worship space literally came from the ashes.

Jesus does not just give resurrection to Lazarus. Jesus does not just dispense new life to Lazarus. Jesus himself is OUR resurrection. Jesus himself is OUR new life. We are already right now ‘resurrection people.’ This means that there is already within the people of God today a work of the Holy Spirit sparking within us the beginnings of dying and rising. Like Coventry, we can rise out of whatever ashes are in our lives.

Let this story from Jesus today remind you about all that it is in our world and in our own lives that must first die in order for resurrection to happen. A first glance at this might be appealing. Yes, God, take away my pain and my brokenness. Put to death all those pieces of my world which cause anxiety and stress. Take away cancer and food allergies and depression. Take away hatred and greed and fighting.

But what about when it gets a little more personal? God, put to death the idols that I cling onto in my life; the idols that I admit I love and don't easily want to give up. Because those things have to die to resurrect a new life. God, put to death the inequality which allows me to live in wealth and privilege at the expense of people who struggle to live on less than a few dollars a day. Because those things must die to resurrect a new life. God,

put to death the fear and selfishness which kill and isolate people I don't like. Because fear and selfishness must die to resurrect a new life. God, put to death the choke-hold I keep on all my possessions which consume all my time and all my resources while the needs of others around me go ignored. Because those things must die to resurrect a new life. My sin of entitlement must die to resurrect a new life.

Some things need to die and stay dead in order for us to have life. Some things need to get reprioritized – moved to another place in the pecking order of our life. I heard the story this week about this guy whose friend was opening a new business in another part of town and he thought, “well he's opening a new business, I better send something by way of recognition and congratulations.” He called up the local florist and said, “My friend's opening a new business and I want to send him a bouquet of flowers, something appropriate, and put my name on it.”

He went to the grand opening for the new business and looked around for the flowers with his name on them. To his shock, it was a funeral wreath with a big banner on it that said, ‘Rest in Peace.’ He was angry. He called up the florist and said, “That's not the kind of thing you send to the grand opening of a new business!” The florist said ‘You think you've got problems, think about me. Out there somewhere is a funeral with a bouquet that has a banner that reads ‘Good luck in your new location.’²

What needs to rest in peace and what needs a new location on your priority ladder? I am the resurrection and the life reminds us that Jesus is Lord in this life and that he wants to give us an abundant life in this world as well as the next. Maybe there is something that has you bound in a tomb. What is it that keeps you from being the person that God wants you to be? Fear? Grief? Isolation? We need to send those things flowers with a “Rest in Peace” banner. Jesus wants to call you out of that tomb and unbind you and set you free to be fully alive. It takes a risk to answer the call of Jesus to come out and hear him say, “Unbind her, and let her go.”

Maybe you identify more with the sisters who are outside of the tomb. What is inside the tomb that you believe is gone forever, which paralyzes you from getting on with your life? Is hope buried away in there? The positive attitude you used to have? The loss of someone dear? The faith that used to seem so clear and vibrant? Is your willingness or ability to love sealed away in that tomb because of past hurts or disappointments or loss? Maybe those things need to get the flowers that say “Good Luck in Your New Location” as you reprioritize faith and hope and love to a higher calling in your life.

What would happen if you let Jesus unseal that tomb? Would your mind be flooded with fears and negative thoughts about the unfortunate consequences that might come about as a result, like the Pharisees? Would your instinct be to slam that rock back up against the opening and not take the risk? The good news is that Jesus is Lord over death and that believing in him leads to eternal life. But I think there is more than that. I think it is not just about then but it's about now. Christ can make you alive, today, here, now. Your response to the question that Jesus asked Martha is key. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life...Do you believe this?" What is your response? Do you believe this?

In Hanover, Germany is a graveyard - the Garden Churchyard. There is a monument tottering from its foundation. It is built of massive stones that were secured by heavy iron clasps. The monument was erected in the year 1782. Besides the usual family inscriptions, at the base of the monument are engraved these arrogant lines: "The sepulcher, purchased for all eternity, is not permitted to be opened." Except that, a seed, perhaps carried by the wind or a bird, found its way into a crevice of the foundation. Over the years, this little seed grew to be a strong tree. It mocked the proud inscription of the monument, raised the massive stones from their foundation, and opened the lock on the grave. This open grave reminds the visitor that new life can open the strongest tomb. ³

That is what Jesus offers when he says, "I am the resurrection and the life." Yes, Christ offers eternal life, but he also offers life here and now when our response is - "you are the Messiah, the son of the living God, our personal savior." I hope that is your response.

¹ Primary commentary help for this sermon found at www.workingpreacher.org, commentary by Meda Stamper, Commentary on John 11:1-45, April 10, 2011.

² This story found in sermon by Steve Jones, Resurrection, and the Life, found at www.sermonsearch.com.

³ This story found at <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/attempting-to-escape-the-resurrection>.