

#1681

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John 11:21-27^[1]
Jesus is the resurrection
and the life.
Free Text for funeral

Pastor A. J. Kunde
Grace WELS Durand MI
Funeral Service of
Norma Margaret Crawford
November 9, 2011

²¹ "LORD," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, LORD," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

BELIEVERS IN JESUS NEVER DIE

I. THEY LIVE NOW

II. THEY LIVE THROUGH DEATH

III. THEY LIVE IN THE RESURRECTION

In the Name of Jesus who is the Resurrection and the Life, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

Jesus was on the east side of the Jordan River, when he received this message from Mary and Martha concerning their brother Lazarus: "Lord, the one whom you love is sick" (11:3). Mary and Martha wanted Jesus to come and heal Lazarus's sickness.

Jesus had been demonstrating all along that he could heal the sick. He was nearing the end of his three-year public ministry. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people had benefited from Jesus' miracles of healing. Now Jesus' friend, the one whom he loved and to whom he was close – Jesus' friend, Lazarus, was sick. Surely, Jesus would come quickly to his friend and heal him. Yet the verses preceding our text tell us that Jesus delayed in coming. "What kind of a friend is this?" The same kind of question arises after the words of our text when some who had gathered around the tomb of Lazarus and see Jesus standing there weeping, ask, "Could not he [Jesus] who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man [Lazarus] from dying?" (11:37). Jesus, however, gives the proper

^[1] *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

perspective on the death of Lazarus when he says, "This sickness [of Lazarus] will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (11:4). Jesus was about to demonstrate the truth upon which our text is centered: BELIEVERS IN JESUS NEVER DIE! BELIEVERS IN JESUS NEVER DIE -- I. THEY LIVE NOW; II. THEY LIVE THROUGH DEATH; and, III. THEY LIVE IN THE RESURRECTION.

BELIEVERS IN JESUS NEVER DIE I. THEY LIVE NOW

Martha came to Jesus and said, "LORD, if you had been here my brother would not have died" (11:21). Jesus answers her in part, "He who believes in me will live" (11:25b). Life, real and true and genuine life, begins for a person at his or her conversion – when he or she is brought to faith in Jesus; when he or she is brought from unbelief to faith in Jesus as his or her Savior. Later on, Jesus tells Martha, "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (11:26a). In those words, Jesus is describing an on-going status or on-going condition. It is the status of being a believer; it is the condition of believing in Jesus and continuing to believe in Jesus to the very end. How did Lazarus come to have faith in Jesus? How did Mary and Martha come to have faith in Jesus? How did they continue in that faith?

On an earlier occasion Jesus had visited the home of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). While we are not told, we assume that their brother Lazarus was also there. On that occasion, Martha had been busy, bustling about with the preparations of the meal that Jesus and his disciples were going to enjoy. Mary, however, was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to what Jesus was saying. While Martha was upset that Mary was not helping, and while Jesus gently rebuked Martha for focusing so much on the earthly preparations instead of focusing on his teaching, nevertheless, by what Martha says in our text, she too must have been listening on that occasion as well as on other occasions. For in our text, Martha gives testimony to the faith in her heart. She says in answer to Jesus' question, "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come^[2] into the world" (11:27). How could Martha make such a confession?

How could Martha make such a confession concerning Jesus? How could Mary also believe that about Jesus? How could Lazarus, who was now dead, have that kind of faith in Jesus? The answer lay in what we know about Mary in that encounter she had with Jesus when Jesus visited her and her sister's home. She listened to God's Word. She heard the Gospel, the Good News, that Jesus

^[2] Martha refers to Jesus as "The Coming One (ο J ... ejrcovmeno)". This was a messianic title that pointed to the coming of God's Son, the Redeemer and Savior of the world. This was what Martha was also confessing about Jesus.

was her Savior and the Savior of the world. By that faith in Jesus, Mary and Martha now lived – they had real and genuine life.

APPROPRIATION

Norma Crawford had the blessing of God's Word in her life. She was born on November 20, 1922. On December 5, 1922, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Norma was baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Word of God. Norma continued to hear and study God's Word as a student at St. Paul's Lutheran Elementary School in Saginaw. On April 5, 1936, Norma was confirmed in the Lutheran Christian faith at the same church where she was baptized, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Saginaw. The only way in which Norma was able to have faith in Jesus as her Savior was through God's Word, specifically, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. This continued to the end of her life as I visited her with Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the strengthening of her faith.

The same Gospel of Jesus – the Good News that Jesus substituted his perfect life for the sins of the world and sacrificed his life on the cross for all – this same Gospel is being presented to you. Yet, how often are you tempted not to continue in this Gospel of Jesus?

You are tempted not to continue in the Gospel of Jesus – the Good News that he is your Savior. You are tempted not to continue in that Gospel by not regularly hearing it, learning it, studying it, meditating upon it. You are tempted to think that you do not need the Gospel by considering yourself "good enough" to stand before God on Judgment Day. "Oh," you might be tempted to say, "I know that I am not perfect, but God surely does not expect perfection, does he? After all, God knows that no one is perfect." But God has said, "Be holy! Be perfect! Even as I am holy and perfect!" (cf. Leviticus 19:2b; Matthew 5:48).

God's demand for holiness and perfection is absolute. In addition, do not underestimate God's anger, wrath and judgment against sin – against anything or anyone that does not measure up to his perfection. You need the Gospel.

You need to continue in the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus did everything perfectly before God. That Gospel is the Good News that Jesus is holy and righteous just as God demanded. That Gospel is the Good News that Jesus' holiness, righteousness, innocence, and sinlessness, has been credited to you by faith alone in him as your Savior. St. Paul testifies to this when he proclaims, "It is by grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8a). This is the Gospel that was preached and proclaimed to Norma and is being preached and proclaimed to you now also. But there is more.

There is more. Through the Gospel, believers are given the promise that even when they die they live.

BELIEVERS IN JESUS NEVER DIE II. THEY LIVE THROUGH DEATH

After he had received the news that Lazarus was sick, Jesus told his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up” (11:11b). His disciples misunderstood what Jesus was saying. They thought that Jesus was telling them that Lazarus had literally fallen asleep. Jesus had to make clear to them exactly what he meant. Jesus told his disciples, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him” (11:14,15). Indeed, Jesus was going to Lazarus to awaken him; Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead, even though Lazarus had been dead in the tomb for four days. Moreover, Martha, one of Lazarus’s sisters, expresses the hope that even though Jesus did not come while Lazarus was sick and still alive – Martha expresses the hope that Jesus could still do something. Martha says, “I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask” (11:22). Jesus assures Martha that even though Lazarus is physically dead, yet he is alive.

Jesus says, “I AM The Resurrection and The Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (11:25,26). The true and genuine living and believing that began with Lazarus’ conversion – his change from unbelief to faith in Jesus through the Gospel – that living continues even through death. Lazarus was alive even though he was physically dead. By faith in Jesus, Lazarus continued to live through death.

APPROPRIATION

That on-going life even through death belongs to believers in Jesus. Recall that I mentioned that Norma had been baptized on December 5, 1922. In Romans Chapter Six, St. Paul describes one of the benefits of Holy Baptism. St. Paul says that believers continue to live through death.

St. Paul writes, “... do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:3&11). St. Paul says that believers are “alive to God in Christ Jesus.” In addition, St. Paul states that death no longer has any mastery over Jesus (Romans 6:9), so also death has no mastery over those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus – those who are in Christ Jesus by faith. By faith in Jesus, believers continue to live even though they die. Jesus’ parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus illustrates this.

In that parable, when Lazarus died he went immediately to heaven (cf. Luke 16:22ff). Similarly, Jesus told the criminal who was crucified with him, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). When believers in Jesus die, their souls are immediately in heaven with Jesus. This life through death is yours by faith alone in Jesus.

As was the case for Norma, often times you will be tempted to fear death. Certainly, your sinful nature still has that fear. But as a believer in Jesus, you need not fear death any longer. Jesus has conquered death for you. Through Jesus' Word, you are assured that when you die, you will be in heaven with Jesus. Thus, with St. Paul you can confess: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23b). Believers in Jesus never die. Believers in Jesus live through death. When you die on this earth, your soul is immediately in heaven with Jesus.

In addition, believers in Jesus look forward to the Last Day when Jesus will raise all the dead and give to believers in him eternal life in heaven in both body and soul.

BELIEVERS IN JESUS NEVER DIE III. THEY LIVE IN THE RESURRECTION

Martha tells Jesus that if he had been there, her brother, Lazarus, would not have died. Jesus answers her, "Your brother will rise" (11:23). Martha responds, "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the Last Day" (11:24). Martha confesses her faith in the resurrection from the dead on the Last Day. This was the faith also of Old Testament believers.

As you heard earlier, the Old Testament believer Job testified,

²⁵ ***I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.***
²⁶ ***And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;***
²⁷ ***I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another*** (Job 19:25-27).

The LORD proclaimed through the Prophet Hosea, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O Death, are your plagues? Where, O Grave, is your destruction?" (Hosea 13:14). St. Paul echoes these words in First Corinthians Chapter Fifteen,

⁵⁴ ... ***"Death has been swallowed up in victory!"***
⁵⁵ ***"Where, O Death, is your victory?
Where, O Death, is your sting?"***
⁵⁶ ***The sting of Death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law.*** ⁵⁷
***But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our
LORD Jesus Christ*** (1 Corinthians 15:54b-57; cf. Isaiah 25:8 & Hosea 13:14).

Old Testament believers knew that there would be a Last Day, a Judgment Day, on which believers in the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, would be raised from the

dead and have eternal life. Jesus proclaims, “Everyone who looks to the Son [to Jesus] and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the Last Day” (John 6:40b). The only way to have eternal life in both body and soul in the resurrection on the Last Day, is by believing in Jesus. Believers in Jesus never die, they live in the resurrection. This is the truth that Jesus presents to Martha.

Jesus says to Martha, “I AM The Resurrection and The Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Then Jesus adds the question, “Do you believe this?” (11:25&26). We hear Martha’s reply, “Yes, LORD, ... I believe that you are the Christ, The Son of God, who was to come into the world” (11:27). The faith, which Martha expresses with her mouth, and the faith that is found in her heart, was the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. Jesus is that Gospel; Jesus is the Good News of the forgiveness of sins for all people. This was Martha’s faith. Is this your faith also?

APPROPRIATION

Jesus asks the same question of you that he asked of Martha: “Do you believe this?” Do you believe that Jesus is “the resurrection and the life?” Do you believe that by faith alone in Jesus you live even though you die? Do you believe that by faith alone in Jesus, you too shall rise from the dead on the Last Day and enjoy eternal life in heaven with Jesus in both body and soul? Such hope and confidence and faith certainty does not come from within yourself. Rather, the faith, the hope, the confidence, and the certainty that you have that on the Last Day you shall rise to have eternal life in heaven with Jesus, comes by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus. You are saved by faith alone in Jesus. In that faith, look forward to the resurrection from the dead and the life of the world to come.

CONCLUSION

Norma Crawford had the opportunity to have the Gospel as her own during her life on this earth. She was baptized. She was confirmed in the Lutheran Christian faith. When she was still able to get around, she attended worship and Holy Communion regularly. When she was no longer able to travel, her pastor brought Word and Sacrament to her. Norma had the Gospel. You have the Gospel.

Through the Gospel of Jesus, you are brought to faith in Jesus. By that faith in Jesus, you continue to live through death. By that faith in Jesus, you will be raised on the Last Day to enjoy eternal life in heaven with Jesus and with all believers in him. Hold on to that faith in Jesus by continuing in the Gospel of Jesus. Amen.