

Sermon: Resurrection people

Jesus said:

**I am the resurrection and the life.
Whoever believes in me will live,
even though he dies;
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.**

Gospel of John 11:25/26

Whether in a cemetery or a crematorium any funeral service I conduct will include these words:

Jesus said: I am the resurrection and the life.

Whatever else is said whoever the person was - their age, their life experience, whatever their faith or that of the mourners I include:

Jesus said: I am the resurrection and the life.

These words give to us all something we so desperately need when we are faced with the reality of loss including the death of someone we love. They give us hope. Hope that allows the possibilities of God into places of human impossibility. Hope that allows God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Each one of us will face losses of different kinds throughout our lives: in our personal relationships; in our work; in our expectations of life, of others, of ourselves. In the face of loss people respond in a variety of ways: anger or despair, frantic activity or silent withdrawal. The passage Steve read for us

shows us two sisters, Martha and Mary, responding differently following the loss of their brother. They both know that Jesus is coming at last to Bethany. Martha is the type of person who cannot sit still but must be doing all the time so she gets up and goes quickly to meet him. Mary remains at home.

Both women however when they do both eventually meet Jesus, greet him with almost the same words: **'Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died...'**

Who when they are grieving does not go through that stage of 'if only....'. Regret. Reproach: Jesus, why didn't you come sooner? Remorse: Why didn't we send the message before Lazarus got really bad? If only....

Then Martha says: **'Even now whatever you ask of God, God will grant it to you.'** Is this real faith or a desperate clutching at straws? Martha knew Jesus had done marvellous, incredible things before. He had brought back the son of the widow of Tain. He had called the little daughter of Jairus, to get up out of her deathbed. But this was different. Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. Beyond any hope of resuscitation. Practical as ever Martha herself would later warn of the smell of decomposition as Jesus ordered them to open up the tomb where Lazarus had been laid. I really don't think even Martha even with all her trust - her belief - in Jesus would allow for that great impossibility of bringing Lazarus back to life.

So when Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again. She wouldn't be thinking of the next few days or weeks or anytime

soon but would be looking ahead to the end times - the final days - to the general resurrection of all God's faithful people. That golden, glorious time when God would put things right for ever – when God's justice would prevail - when there would be an end to all the suffering of his people. This was the conventional belief of many - but not all - Jews of the time.

Maybe other well meaning friends had already tried to offer some consolation along these lines. Or maybe she and her sister had tried to comfort one another. We can almost hear them speak : *yes Lazarus is gone now but there will be a time when the faithful will live with God in everlasting peace and joy. We don't know how. We don't know when but there will be such a time. You just have to have faith.*

So Martha has faith. She holds onto the faith of her family - the faith of her ancestors and says: **'I know Lazarus will rise again at the resurrection on the last day'**.

But Jesus says to her: **'I am the resurrection and the life'**. He doesn't say: There will be a time when I am resurrected. He doesn't say: I will be a part of the resurrection. He says: I **am** the resurrection. The resurrection is not to be some distant and obscure event. But where and when Jesus is.

For Martha resurrection is no longer - some vague, religious, almost mythical hope but a reality grounded in the person of Jesus standing with her. Resurrection becomes a real possibility to her because of the reality of her relationship with

Jesus. From him she heard 'good news 'in the midst of her loss. Her grief at the separation from the brother she loves is still painful but now she has hope. She has - as we also say in our funeral services - 'sure and certain hope'. Belief in what is hoped for will actually happen. Martha has hope because of her trust and faith in Jesus who he is - what he has done - what he will do.

So when Jesus asks her: **'Do you believe this?'** She is able to say: **'Lord I do. I now believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world.'**

The question for us today is the same: Do you believe this? Do we share Martha's faith? Do we share Martha's hope?

We have the advantage over Martha at this point. Today's 'I am' claim is so important that it is soon confirmed by a miracle. If we were to continue to the end of the chapter we would see that Lazarus does indeed rise again. Jesus calls him out of the darkness and death of the tomb and gives to him the gift of new life.

If we were to read even further we would see Jesus' own death on the cross but then the miracle of Easter morning and his resurrection - the empty tomb - the risen Christ - his encounters and continuing relationship with his followers. We would understand that in his dying and in his rising again Jesus gives to all the gift of new and eternal life.

When we hear Jesus say: **I am the resurrection and the life.** The meaning of our lives can take on a new definition.

Life is no longer to be understood as the time we spend in this world in our earthly bodies but the time we spend in our relationship with God in and through Jesus Christ.

And this relationship is eternal. It doesn't end when we lose friends or family or money or health or jobs or social standing. It does not cease even when our earthly bodies die. It is for ever.

If we believe, how we spend this earthly life will be different. We will be able to live in hope however dark these times may seem. If we believe.

Jesus said to Martha, 'Do you believe?'

Today he says to us 'Do you believe?'

Amen.