

“RESURRECTION and LIFE are HERE & NOW!”

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died...."

Jesus answered, "Your brother will rise again"

to which Martha replied, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Then Jesus said, "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?"

This is one of the texts that it often read at funerals, probably because of Martha's words,

"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

But notice how Jesus responds to this: *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."

First, he agrees with her: Yes, those who believe in him, even though they die, will rise again in the resurrection on the last day and live.

But then he goes on to say,

"AND, everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" – which is something entirely different.

In other words, when Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection" he is talking about 2 different kinds of resurrection.

One has to do with one's physical self/body, which will one day die, and which will someday be raised to live in the eternal now with God.

But the other has to do with one's spiritual self/soul,

which once activated by that born-again encounter with the living God, will never die.

Once you have been born-again and are living life in that spiritual realm with Jesus, you – that is, your spiritual self – will never die.

So what does that mean to be resurrected in the here and now and have life in Jesus?

Well, first of all, note that Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection AND the Life" –

not just "I am the Resurrection" or "I am the Life", which again means he's talking about 2 different things – not different in the timing – when the body is alive & when the body dies – but different in another sense.

Resurrection, as opposed to Life, is a singular event, a specific experience.

Now by that I'm not saying that it is necessarily only a one-time experience.

But it is something that happens at a particular moment (or moments) in time that raises one up from some kind of death into a new kind of life.

We don't know for sure that Nicodemus had a resurrection experience,

but from the courage he exhibits at Jesus' crucifixion, I'd argue that at some point he did.

The encounter that the woman at the well had with Jesus that day was certainly a resurrection experience –

as his revelation of himself and his invitation into a relationship with him healed her heart,

washing away all her guilt and shame and taking away her need to hide herself away from society.

She was healed, made whole, forgiven, accepted, loved – raised to new life –

and that experience filled her with such joy and excitement

that it transformed her relationships with everyone else, giving her a brand-new life.

The encounter that the blind man had with Jesus that day was certainly a resurrection experience –

as he opened his eyes and saw for the first time the light and shapes and colors and textures of a whole new world.

The encounter that Lazarus & his sisters had with Jesus was certainly a resurrection experience!

I've had resurrection experiences, too –

having a friend walk with me through suffering & despair and then glimpsing the risen Christ in an Emmaus moment; wondering what on earth I, an agnostic, was doing at divinity school,

and then having the lightbulb of faith turned on by a professor's simple question;

hearing an Easter sermon that led me to have the faith needed for my migraines to be cured;

having life-crushing depression healed in an experience of complete acceptance, grace, & love;

and having prayers answered by unexplainable miracles.

That's what Jesus means when he says he is the Resurrection –

he doesn't just raise our bodies after they die, he can raise our spirits every time they die, too.

He meets us like he met Nicodemus in moments of confusion'

he meets us like he met the woman at the well in times of guilt & shame and loneliness & rejection,

he meets us like he met the man born blind in seasons of suffering and pain,

he meets us like he met Martha and Mary in experiences of sorrow and grief,

he meets us like he met Lazarus in times of helplessness and hopelessness.

Whenever our spirit, our faith, our trust in God has died, Jesus the Resurrection meets us and raises us up to life again.

But Jesus doesn't just say, "I am the Resurrection"; he says, "I am the Resurrection AND the Life"

That means that when Jesus raises our spirit from death, he raises it to new life.

It's so difficult to explain how this life, this spiritual life, this abundant life is different

from the ordinary life that people who have not been born again experience.

If you've had such experiences, you'll know what I'm talking about, but if you haven't, let me try to describe it.

It's the difference between the ordinary & the extraordinary, the reasonable & the miraculous.

It's the difference between the things we can explain and the things we can only imagine.

It's the difference between water and sparkling water, between wine and champagne.

It's the difference between the black and white world of Kansas and the colorful world of Oz,

between mundane existence and a rich and full world of magic and mystery and miracles.

So how do you know if you are living the abundant life that Jesus offers? I can think of 3 ways.

First, there will be a defining Resurrection moment that changes who you are and who you know God to be.

For the rest of his life Nicodemus would remember his encounter with Jesus – because from then on his life was changed.

For the rest of her life, the Samaritan woman would remember her encounter with Jesus

that day at the well – because from that point on her life was changed.

For the rest of his life, that man would remember when Jesus gave him sight—because from then on his life was changed.

For the rest of their lives Lazarus as well as his sisters would remember

the day Jesus raised him from the dead – because from that point on his and their lives were changed.

For the rest of my life, I will always remember my encounters with Jesus

because each one of them changed who I was and who I knew God to be.

So the first thing you need to live the abundant life Jesus offers is a resurrection experience.

Second, there will be specific changes as illustrated by these 4 stories:

Like Nicodemus, you will never be content with what you know about God,

but will have an ongoing yearning to know more about who God is and what God desires.

Like the Samaritan woman whose heart was healed by such acceptance and grace and love,

you will be so filled with excitement and joy that you will have no choice but to share it.

Like the man whose eyes were opened, you will see God & the world & your neighbor & yourself in an entirely new way.

And like Lazarus, you will know with complete faith that nothing is impossible for God.

So after a resurrection experience, your mind and heart and body and spirit will be changed.

Third, you will understand that God's plans involve so many other pieces of the puzzle than your own little piece

that you'll need to trust in God's timing and wait for God to act.

Nicodemus waited, his mind suffering from confusion.

The Samaritan woman waited for years, her heart suffering from loneliness.

The man born blind waited for decades, his body suffering from total blindness.

Lazarus waited, suffering and dying, until he died.

Martha and Mary waited, their spirits sorrowing and grieving,

while Lazarus suffered, and died, and lay dead for four never-ending days.

But Jesus showed up, not at the time they wanted, but at the time that was right

not only for them but for everyone who knew them & for everyone who would ever know about them – including us.

So after a resurrection experience, your mind and heart and body and soul will be changed

and life will be different, fuller, richer, more vibrant, more abundant,

and your understanding of God will have grown so that you learn to trust in God's timing as you wait.

Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life".

I hope you will meditate on those words this week, looking back on – or praying for – three things:

resurrection moments, the abundant life Jesus offers, and the faith to wait for God's miracles.

Will you please pray with me?