

RISEN AND TURNED LOOSE

John 11:17-44

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Easter, April 16, 2017

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/risen-and-turned-loose/>

“If you had been here, my brother would still be alive!” (vv. 21, 32). Twice Jesus heard this on his way to Lazarus’ grave, once from each of Lazarus’ sisters. The sermon series we just completed dealt with the absence of God, and the assurance that God loves us even when the worst occurs. Death still happens, but when it happens in the context of a Savior who weeps with us (v. 35) and loves us (v. 36) and has canceled death’s power (vv. 25-26).

In vv. 25-26, Jesus makes perhaps the most audacious claim of his life. He IS resurrection and life. How many times have I said those words? I did so at a memorial service yesterday, standing in this very spot. Think about it. Jesus didn’t say, “I bring resurrection or I offer it or give it. I AM!”

And note. Jesus is resurrection and the life. You see, Martha had tried to make resurrection something far off and vague (v. 23). Jesus said no. It is here and now. When does eternal life begin for you as a believer? The moment you trust Christ, not when you die! You see, following Jesus is an invitation to become so much more than you ordinarily believe you can be. Not surviving. Thriving. Flourishing. Living! In the old, classic movie, “Cool Hand Luke,” Luke is in a prison in the South, and he keeps breaking the rules and trying to escape. One time, as punishment, his supervising guards have him dig a hole, fill it up, dig another, over and over. His legs are shackled. He is exhausted and he is imprisoned. Does that describe your existence? Just digging holes, filling them up, and digging another, all the while shackled, locked up.

Why do people come to Easter worship? (other than my mom/wife made me!)? I wrote about this to the church family last Wednesday. John Shelby Spong once wrote that every human being has a yearning, a hope, a desire to taste life on a new level. Easter appeals to hidden dreams, forlorn hopes that are more than we are now experiencing [*The Easter Moment*]. So, are you with me? Resurrection is not just an event at the end of physical life; it is a gift every day of our earthly existence. “I am the resurrection and the life.”

How do we get in on this? Mary’s response was personal (in the Greek, the “I” is emphatic, repeated, “I and not someone else doing it for me”). It is specific, not vague. She actively commits herself to (believes into) this Jesus who is God’s anointed one, Son of God, the one to come.

And to show that he is not all talk, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. He stands outside the tomb and shouts (not whispers), “Lazarus, come out!” (v. 43). Just as Genesis says that God spoke the worlds into existence, at Jesus’ mere words, life is created. Now note carefully how John phrases it in v. 44: “The dead man came out...” It’s almost a comedic scene, Lazarus stumbling around, wrapped in grave clothes (like a scene from “The Walking Dead”?). And here may be the most under-reported command Jesus ever gave: “Unbind him and let him go!” (v.

44). Remember Cool Hand Luke? Those chains? That fence? Unbind your life! The resurrection of Jesus frees us from sin and death, but oh, so much more. It sets us free to do more than protect our lives; we are free to offer them [I am indebted to Walter Bouman for this thought, *Christian Century*, Sept. 20, 2005, p. 19]. To offer them in Mission JC, on mission trips, to our neighbors, to visit widows, to bake bread, to relieve suffering, and to tell others about Jesus.

And let me tell you. There is nothing more threatening to Satan and hell than the Lord of life, risen and turned loose! And there is nothing more threatening to sin, hell and death than Christ's army of believers, also risen and turned loose! In John Masefield's play, "The Trial of Jesus," the climax occurs in a dialogue between a Roman centurion and Pilate's wife. The centurion returns from Jesus' crucifixion and reports to Pilate. The governor's wife is terrified, because she has had dreams. "Do you think he is dead?" The centurion replies, "No, lady I don't." She insists, "Then where is he?" And the Roman's reply: "Let loose in the world, lady, where neither Jew nor Roman can stop his truth."