

John 11:17-27, 38-53

It has been ten years since Princess Diana was killed in a car wreck, and still every now and then, there is a headline story about her. Elvis has been dead for more than thirty years, yet his devoted fans still claim he is alive, and Elvis impersonators are growing by leaps and bounds. Had Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead last week, every reporter and cameraman in the world would not only have covered every detail of the resurrection; Lazarus himself would be hounded by paparazzi, and the rest of his life would be headline news around the world.

And yet, not one reporter is here today. Not one headline story has been written whenever we have had a baptism here. The paparazzi do not follow you around from dawn until dusk. But why not? The same word of Christ that raised Lazarus to life is heard here within these walls. Each and every baptism at our font is just as much a resurrection as the raising of Lazarus was. Each one of you is living evidence that God brings the dead to life. So where are the reporters? Where are the camera crews?

If we had big red billboards along the highway saying silly and ridiculous things about our church, that might put us on the evening news; but the simple and ordinary preaching and teaching of God's Word, and the quiet and perhaps mundane giving of His grace in water, bread and wine does nothing to attract the world's attention. It's big news when Patrick Swayze has pancreatic cancer, but when God's people who struggle with the cancer of sin are being given new life here in Christ week after week, no one raises an eyebrow. But that's to be expected because people live by sight and not by faith. They are amazed by what they see, not by what must be believed. A physical resurrection of the body—now that's something! But a spiritual resurrection of the soul—the world couldn't care less.

We're not told that it happened, in John chapter 11, but after Lazarus came out of the tomb there were certainly gasps, and jaws dropping, and eyes becoming as big as saucers...and perhaps even some of the bystanders fainted. It was shocking. He had been dead four days! His body was already in the stage of decay. The stench of death was in the air. Not one person was asking Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. Not even Mary and Martha. "Lord," they said, "If you had been here (back when he was sick), then you could have helped our brother." But after four days no one was thinking "resurrection." Jesus had come to comfort the sisters. That's all anyone thought. He loved this family and He came to offer His condolences.

But Jesus knew all along what He was going to do. And if the stench of death was in the air before He raised Lazarus, the stench of jealousy and murder was in the air after he was raised. There were some who were crying tears of joy—Mary, Martha, and some others. There were some who believed in Him. There were others who reported Him to the Pharisees. They were tattletales. "Guess what Jesus just did!" And then there were the Pharisees along with the Jewish Council who said, "It's time to get rid of Him. He is going to ruin our whole way of life!" From that day on they planned to put Jesus to death, and not just Jesus; they had to get rid of the evidence as well, so they also made plans to put Lazarus back into the grave by killing him too. Talk about your "conspiracy theories!" Stories about JFK and Princess Diana have nothing on this one. Here we see an all-out secret effort to kill Him who is the Resurrection and the Life.

But would it be any different today? If Lazarus had been raised just last week we would witness an identical reaction. Some would be overjoyed. Some would believe in Him. And some would conspire to get rid of Jesus. "If He is allowed to go on like this, He will ruin our Social Security system! It's already in trouble, but if He keeps raising the dead to life, that will simply add more and more people to those already drawing Social Security. It will break the bank! Not only that, but He'll put doctors, and nurses, and morticians out of work. Hospitals will have to close their doors. Our entire economy will be destroyed. No, better to get rid of Jesus than to allow our people to suffer through all this."

And what about you and me? We're the evidence. Jesus has raised you to life in your baptism. Jesus keeps giving you new life here in His Word and Sacrament. We're told that after Lazarus was raised, people would come from all over just to get a look at him. If scores of people flock to the tomb of Elvis who has not been raised, imagine all the numbers who would flock to see Lazarus if his resurrection had taken place last week.

Lazarus isn't here today, but you are. You, friends, are Jesus' Lazarus's today. Are people flocking to your door? Are your neighbors looking at you in awe? "So, you were dead in your trespasses and sins, but Jesus raised you to life with Him? Wow!" Oh, that's not happening? Well perhaps we're just blending in too well. Perhaps we're not living as those whom God has raised to life in Christ, but as those who set their minds on earthly, not heavenly things. One look at us and our neighbors may think to themselves: "You're no different from me. You're no Lazarus. Your language is as crude as mine. Your Bible stays as closed as mine does. Your priorities in life are the same as mine are...I don't give my money to support the church; I spend my Sunday mornings on me, and I can see that you are not all that different from me." If you and I do not live the risen life in Christ, how will others know what God has done for us and in us?

Let's look again at what He did for Lazarus. He was dead. Not sleeping, not in a coma, but dead. They did not want to open up his tomb. "It will stink," they said. Dead people don't come back to life on their own, but Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, and He called out in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!" Now why do you think He did that? Speak in a loud voice, that is. How loud does one have to speak to wake the dead? It wasn't for Lazarus' sake; it was for the sake of the people. They needed to hear Jesus' voice clearly so that they would know and believe that Jesus is the one who called him forth. The power is in the word of Christ, not in the loudness of that word. Lazarus didn't yell back, "What was that you said?" He simply came out. He who had died came to life because Jesus' words called him to life. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

And that's why you are here today. Not to be spectators and bystanders; not to be tattletales to what God is doing here for others. You are here as Lazarus himself because you and I need resurrecting. If you're like me, and I think you are, then last week was a bad week because you and I grievously sinned against our God. We ignored His Word of Scripture. We failed to go to Him in prayer. We basically lived as selfish, ungrateful people. We lived as though we don't have a God except for our own desires and pleasures.

It is death to live in such a way. It is death to reject the commands of God. It is death to live for our self. We are Lazarus today because we have shut ourselves up within the tomb of our sinful hearts and lives. We're dead in sin, and you and I can do nothing to change that.

But Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, is here for you. He who gave you His life in your baptism will not reject you for going your own sinful way in life. He is here to resurrect you. He understands death. He's been there. He already died the death you and I deserved. He suffered hell for you. He understands rejection. His Father rejected Him on the cross because He was carrying your sins. He understands the grave. He was buried in a tomb for you, and He came out of that tomb to be, for you, the Resurrection and the Life.

And that's why He is here today. I don't need to yell these words to you. It's not the loudness of the words. It's the fact that the words I speak to you are Jesus' words of life. "I forgive you," He says, "I died for each and every one of you; you are, all of you, forgiven for every sin. I am life for you," He says, "Even though you deserve death, I give you eternal life. Heaven is yours because I give it to you. You don't have to wonder if you will go to heaven; heaven is yours now because it is My gift to you who believe in Me."

Forget the reporters. Forget the cameramen. We don't need them. We have Jesus. He who is the Resurrection and the Life gives you real life here in His words to you. He who resurrected Lazarus from the grave will call you forth one day to live forever with Him in heaven. This is no fairy tale. It's real life. What Christ did for Lazarus He does for you. And so you, friend, can live in Him, and work in Him, and sleep in Him...and die in Him; because in Jesus there is forgiveness and life for you. Amen.