

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)

**Sexagesima Sunday, January 27, 2008**

✠ ✠ ✠

Hymns: 593 (524:7) 603, 356, 341:4.

Lessons: Jonah 1; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Mark 8:27-33

Text: John 11:20-27

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Friends in Christ our Sure Hope,

A Christian expresses his conviction in the words of Paul, *“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,”* 2 Corinthians 5:1-2. Experience teaches us that in this vale of tears there is at best labor and sorrow. Sin has made it so. The calamities of life are a heavy load to bear. We are burdened with sin. Even the consecrated believer has to confess with Paul, *“what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing,”* Romans 7:19.

From this unhappy condition we believers wish to be released. We believe that when body and soul are separated in death, our soul will go to heaven. We look forward to this. It is not a wish to be dead, for death in itself is nothing desirable. But death as a passage to eternal life in heaven is to be earnestly desired.

How can a believer be certain that eternal life awaits him? Christ makes us certain with his Word of promise. Let us meditate on:

**THE PROMISE OF THE RESURRECTION**

- 1. Lazarus’ death was the occasion for it;**
- 2. It is contained in Jesus’ words to Martha;**
- 3. It is accepted by faith in Jesus**

In the verses before our text we are told that while Jesus was in the land beyond the Jordan River, a message came to him, *“Lord, the one you love is sick,”* John 11:3. Martha and Mary, Lazarus’ sisters, had sent this message to Jesus. Having received the message, Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. Then he said, *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up,”* John 11:11. When Jesus arrived at Bethany, the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, Lazarus had been in the grave for four days already.

Many mourners had come to comfort Martha and Mary. But our text tells us, *“When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.”* It is good when people come to those who have suffered sorrow so they can comfort them. Human aid and consolation are good, but it is better to also seek the Lord in the days of sorrow and trouble. The Lord says, *“call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me,”* Psalm 50:15. The Bible speaks of our heavenly father, as *“the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles,”* 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. There are many Bible passages that we can read in time of trouble, affliction, and sorrow. The psalmist writes, *“The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you,”* Psalm 9:9-10. The Lord does not forget those who are sorrowing. The psalmist says, *“you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to*

*take it in hand,*” Psalm 10:14. While Martha went to meet Jesus, Mary stayed in the home and received the kind and comforting messages of friends.

When Martha met Jesus, she expressed her disappointment that Jesus had delayed his coming to them. **“‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’”** There is a slight suggestion of reproach in Martha’s words because Jesus had not come immediately to the sickbed of Lazarus. It is a common mistake when we have thoughts like that. We may think the Lord is less powerful and not so able to help when his will goes contrary to our will. It is useless to think of what we should have done in a particular time of trouble. We should not think, if we had not done this, or if we had called in another doctor, or if we had tried the other medicine sooner, perhaps we could have saved a life. What good does it do to think of all these things that might have been done when God’s will has already been accomplished? We as believers in Christ should submit to the Lord in every trouble or sorrow. Then we spare ourselves useless worry. We should do all we can as we have the opportunity, but leave the rest to God.

After Martha had expressed her disappointment, she immediately also expressed her faith in Jesus. **“But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”** Martha had this faith that whatever Jesus would ask of his heavenly Father God would grant him. She knew from what Jesus had preached previously that he was doing his heavenly Father’s will. So she expressed her strong conviction that the heavenly Father would grant whatever Jesus his Son would ask. So we also should always trust in the power of Jesus to help in times of trouble, affliction, sorrow and grief. We should not be reluctant to speak to the Lord. The father of the boy who was possessed by an evil spirit said to Jesus, **“if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us. ‘If you can’? said Jesus, ‘Everything is possible for him who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’”** Mark 9:22-24. The Lord will surely strengthen our faith when we speak like that.

Now we want to learn how Jesus promised to raise Lazarus from the dead. **This promise of the resurrection is contained in Jesus’ words to Martha.**

## 2.

Jesus said to Martha, **“Your brother will rise again.”** Hearing this, Martha was thinking that Jesus was referring to the resurrection of all the dead on the Last Day. She said, **“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”** Jesus had previously preached, **“my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day,”** John 6:40. When the Jews persecuted Jesus, he spoke to them of his powerful Gospel Word, saying, **“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life,”** John 5:24. The powerful Gospel Word is used by the Holy Spirit to create faith in the hearts of the hearers of the Word, and in this way they are saved. Jesus then added a promise of the general resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. **“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned,”** John 5:28-29.

For the believer in Christ, the soul is not lost at death. It merely is parted from the body and is taken to heaven. So also the body is not lost even though it decays, for Jesus is able to restore it to life on the great Day of the Resurrection. This is a comforting thought to all believers in Christ when they lay away those dear to them who have departed this life in true faith in Jesus. Then they can think of the Lord saying to them; your loved one will rise again. What a happy reunion that will be in heaven. To think of death in this way makes the departure of loved ones much easier to bear.

Martha didn’t realize that Jesus would very shortly fulfill his promise of raising up Lazarus. Before this already, Jesus had raised up the 12-year old daughter of Jairus who had been dead only a short time. Jesus had

also raised up the son of the widow of Nain who was about to be buried. But who would think of raising up a person after lying in the grave for four days? Martha therefore did not expect her brother to be given back to her now. We can learn from this not to think of limiting God's power in time of need if we want to receive full comfort. The Bible assures us that God *"is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,"* Ephesians 3:20. God's arm is not shortened. He will do great things for us that will glorify him and be for our good.

Jesus has the power to raise whom he will and when he will. Jesus told 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.**"* This is another of those great *"I am"* statements made by the Lord. They are words of authority. Jesus declares that he is superior to death, that he has absolute power over death. He is the Fountain of Life. He created life in the beginning. He therefore can also restore life to dead bodies. Emphasizing *"I am"*, Jesus declares that he can do this of his own power, not merely as one who has received this gift from the Father. Jesus is equal to the Father in power, glory, and majesty. Paul says, *"**For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,**"* Colossians 2:9. So also not only will Jesus make the dead alive again in the general resurrection of the dead, but he will also grant believers eternal life.

Note that Jesus in speaking of the resurrection says, *"**He who believes in me will live.**"* Those who in this life trust in Jesus as their Savior will find in him that righteousness that avails before the throne of God. The poet writes, *"**Through Jesus' blood and merit, I am at peace with God.**"*(Hymn 372:1) Jesus fulfilled the Law of God for us and paid the penalty for our sin. We will not be condemned or suffer eternal death. Though the soul of the believer leaves the body in death, Christ will reunite soul and body. Even though the body has decayed to dust, Christ is able to restore this body and give it life. *"**Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.**"* Though the believer indeed dies, this death is not forever. It is not permanent. What a precious promise of life to all who believe in Jesus!

We want to emphasize yet that **the promise of the resurrection is accepted by faith in Jesus.**

### 3.

Jesus asked Martha, *"**Do you believe this?"**"* *"**Yes, Lord,' she told him, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.**"* Remember Martha had not yet seen her brother raised from the grave. She had merely heard Jesus' word of promise, but she believed it. The word of Jesus had accomplished this. Martha was convinced that Jesus could do whatever he pleased. She believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the very Son of God, and the Promised Messiah, who came into the world to be our Savior.

The Holy Spirit through the powerful Word of Christ creates such a faith. It is also strengthened and confirmed by the same Gospel Word. It gives peace of heart and assurance. Do we have such a faith as Martha did? Do we take Jesus' promises at their face value? Do we also make such a confession of our faith as Martha did? If so, we are blessed indeed and will spend eternity in heaven with our Lord and Savior.

*"When we die, dear Savior,  
When we die, dear Savior,  
Grant, we pray, On that day  
That from sorrow you will lead in mercy  
To the joy before your throne forever.  
At your side, Glorified,  
Oh, may we ever praise you!" Amen.  
(Adapted from Hymn 603:4)*