

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 22, 2026
Sermon by Pastor Allen Schroeder
Jesus is the life

John 11:17-27,38-45

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Dear Friends of the Savior,

I am warning you in advance. What I am about to tell you is not a pretty picture. The natural course of human life is this. People are conceived in sin, born in sin, live in sin, die in sin, and go to hell. I warned you. It's not a pretty picture. It's depressing. It's scary. Yet it's the story of the masses of humanity. To make matters worse, despite all past efforts, mankind has not been able to change that natural course of human life. Mankind's future efforts to change that natural course of human life will offer no hope for improvement. The natural course of human life will remain. People will continue to be conceived in sin, born in sin, live in sin, die in sin, and go to hell.

In contrast, when John introduces Jesus to you in the first chapter of his gospel, there is an explosion of information which gives you hope. Jesus is the eternal Word of God. He is the Word of God made flesh. He had the observable glory as the Son of God. He is full of grace and truth. He had life, the kind of life that is the light of mankind.

John said, *"In him was life."* It is one thing to say, "Jesus was alive." It is another thing to say, *"In him was life."* The life in Jesus is exactly what you need. His life breaks you away from that terrible and terrifying existence of being conceived in sin, born in sin, living in sin, dying in sin and going to hell. Why?
Jesus is the Life.

1. Life which overcomes earthly death.

There was a minister by the name of William Sloan Coffin. He was a champion of liberal and social causes while a chaplain at Yale University and at Riverside Church in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. He was popular enough to have a syndicated column published in newspapers across the country. Although I do not appreciate his theology or approach to ministry, there is one thing which Rev. Coffin said that I have used more than once. It happened that Rev. Coffin's son was killed in a car accident. Cards and letters of sympathy and encouragement poured in from around the country. He read them all. Most of the letters reminded this father to find comfort in God's will. A few weeks later, Rev. Coffin responded to this outpouring of sympathy and encouragement. He thanked the people for their love and concern. Then he said, "I do not look at Jesus as the one who willed my son to die. Instead, I look at

Jesus as the first one to shed a tear when he saw that my son had died.” That’s where we find Jesus today. We find Jesus standing outside the tomb of Lazarus, crying.

When the daughter of Jairus died, Jesus told the people, “*Stop weeping.*” After the son of the widow of Nain died, Jesus told her, “*Don’t cry.*” But when Lazarus, “*the one Jesus loved,*” the brother of Mary and Martha, lay in his grave, “*Jesus wept.*” Even Jesus had to weep when faced with the death of someone he dearly loved.

Behind Jesus’ tears is the fact that he intentionally delayed walking to Judea once he received the message Lazarus was sick and dying. Behind Jesus’ tears is the fact that both Mary and Martha told Jesus, “*If you were here, my brother would not have died.*” Behind Jesus’ tears is the fact that he loved Lazarus with a love stronger than the bond of love within a family. Behind Jesus’ tears is the fact that death is the result of sin. Behind Jesus’ tears is the fact that Jesus allowed Lazarus to die so that he could show his glory in his power over death. Therefore, “*Jesus wept.*”

Tears soon gave way to words: a directive, “*Roll away the stone,*” a prayer, “*Father, I thank you that you heard me,*” a word of life, “*Lazarus, come out!*” At Jesus’ word, Lazarus came out of his grave, still wrapped in his burial cloths. Jesus the Life had just demonstrated that he could interrupt the natural course of human life. All were amazed. Some believed in Jesus in whom was life, life which was the light of mankind. Some sought to kill the one who had such power over death. But more than that. As he promised, Jesus showed his glory in this miracle, his glory as the Son of God.

Give Jesus glory for his gift of life. The word glory is based on the word credit. You give Jesus glory when you give him credit for every good in your life. Bless the Lord in your soul. Praise him before others. Believer or unbeliever, friend or foe, no one present denied that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. No one dared to deny, “*In him was life.*” Jesus is the one who is himself the Life. If the natural course of being conceived in sin, born in sin, living in sin, dying in sin, and going to hell has been altered in your life, give credit to Jesus who accomplished it. This miracle proves it. “*In him is life,*” the kind of life which is stronger than death. Jesus the life overcomes physical death.

2. Life which overcomes spiritual death.

This miracle is one in a series of miracles involving Jesus raising the dead. Each new miracle of raising the dead adds a new element. The first person Jesus raised from the dead was the daughter of Jairus. She had just died. She was still lying on her death bed. Her body may have even been warm. Jesus spoke to her like a mother waking up her child on a school day morning. “*Little girl, get up.*” The twelve year old got up as though nothing happened. The second person Jesus raised from the dead was the son of the widow of Nain. That young man had been dead for a while. His body had been prepared for burial. His funeral was over. His body was being carried to the cemetery. Jesus stopped the procession and said to the corpse, “*Young man, I say to you get up.*” The young man immediately sat up and spoke. Jesus returned him to his dear mother. The third person Jesus raised from the dead was Lazarus. He had not just died within hours. His body was not on the way to the cemetery. He had already been buried for four days. Decomposition had already set in. Yet at the words, “*Lazarus, come out!*” the one Jesus loved walked out of his tomb. Those three resurrections prepared the disciples for Jesus’ most difficult resurrection. His own.

It would not be long before Jesus led his disciples back to Judea. “*Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that has been written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished... They will kill him. On the third day, he will rise again.*” The disciples could not wrap their heads around Jesus dying in Jerusalem. They were so preoccupied with Jesus’ words about his death that they never got to his words about his resurrection. They had no comfort going to Jerusalem. Their thoughts were about death, not about life. But Jesus did die and he did rise from the dead.

Paul reminds you of the purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection. “*He was handed over because of our trespasses and was raised to life because of our justification.*” Yes, Jesus the Life was put to death. On the cross he was separated from all the spiritual blessings of God. His Father forsook Jesus on the cross, leaving him alone with the garbage bag of human sin, the garbage bag of your sin, my sin, the sin of the world. Open that bag of sin. It stinks. It’s nauseating. It makes you want to look away. It’s all there.

Your guilt. Your shame. Your pride. Your dirty thoughts. Your fits of rage. Your biting words. Your deeds of revenge. Your... The list continues. Jesus was handed over to death for your trespasses. Mine too.

But death could not hold its grip on him. Why? Jesus is the Life. Don't misunderstand. Jesus wasn't raised from the dead only for his life. He was raised for your life. *"He was raised again for our justification."* By his death, Jesus paid for the sins of all. By his resurrection, God accepted Jesus' sacrifice as punishment for all sins. He expunged the sins of mankind, wiped out the guilt of all people, took away the sins of the world. That achieved the justification of all people. But, as Luther observed, that universal justification was known only to God. It was proclaimed only within the Trinity. It remains hidden in God until it is proclaimed in baptism, preached in sermons, and pronounced in the Lord's Supper. In the gospel in word and sacrament Jesus the life comes to you.

Jesus' death and resurrection have changed the natural course of life for you. No longer does your spiritual biography read conceived in sin, born in sin, live in sin, die in sin, and go to hell. Your spiritual biography now reads conceived in sin, born in sin, live in sin, come to faith, live in faith, die in faith, and go to heaven. That is the new spiritual life which you have through faith in Jesus who is the Life. It is exactly what you need.

3. Life which overcomes eternal death.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead asks as many questions as it answers. Did Lazarus remember what death was like? Did he remember what heaven was like? Was he happy to leave heaven and come back to earth? The Bible is silent about that. That is the Holy Spirit's polite way of saying, "It's none your business. It's no concern of yours." But maybe you could ask yourself. Four days after the funeral of a loved one, would you want Jesus to stand with you beside a mound of dirt or an urn of ashes and bring your loved one back from the heaven for a few more years together on earth? I have never thought of asking that after the death of my parents or my brother. Neither Martha nor Mary asked for such a thing. It is true that Martha said to Jesus, *"I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."* Do not think that she was hinting for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. Rather, think of these powerful words of a hymn, "Be still my soul; your Jesus can repay from his fullness all he takes away." Know that his grace is sufficient for you. The abundant undeserved love of God in Jesus gives you exactly what you need. Everything you need to face the death of a loved one, or your own death, is found in the fulness of life you received from Jesus the Life.

We find ourselves where Martha found herself when Jesus said that her brother will rise again. Her faith was clear and strong. *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* That is what you confess in the Apostles' Creed. "I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

How wonderfully Jesus responds, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish. Do you believe this?"* Yes, Jesus, yes! I believe! I believe that you are the resurrection. I believe that you are the life. I believe that I will live even though I die. I believe that, in you who is the life, I will not perish. I believe that I have eternal life now and forever. I believe that when faced with the death of a loved one, my Jesus can repay from his own fullness all he takes away. Yes, Jesus, yes, said Martha, *"I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."* Faith connects your life with Jesus' life. Faith connects your death with Jesus' death. Faith connects your resurrection with Jesus' resurrection. Faith connects your inheritance in heaven with Jesus' inheritance in heaven. Yes Jesus, yes, I believe "in the life everlasting."

The great wonder is not that so many people are condemned. The great wonder is that some are saved. The great wonder is that you are saved. Jesus the life changed the course of your life. You now live in faith, die in faith, and go to heaven. That is not just a pretty picture, it is exactly what you need. Amen.