I Am the Resurrection and the Life

John 11

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First of all, let me offer a welcome to you as well. We’re glad that you’ve chosen to celebrate Easter with us—the day that life conquered death for all who believe—the great hope of the Christian faith. Without it, Christianity would cease to exist and we, above all people, would be most pitied. But he rose from the dead—as witness by four gospel writers and hundreds of others. And his resurrection life has been experienced millions through the centuries.

Life. It’s a loaded word isn’t it? We put this question out on social media to see what people would say. The question was this, “Do you remember a time you truly felt ALIVE? Full?” People were asked to share about it. Here we are some of the answers. “Hiking Kings Canyon with my siblings. My favorite people in one of my favorite places,” said one person. Another wrote, “May 2012, Jordan River, getting re-baptized, I was with the Wild and Crazy Parkway Israel 2012 group!!” Someone else wrote, “Staying at home with my children for 13 years, being involved in their activities and watching them grow~I loved it.” Another commented that it was a, “…family picnic in the back of the expedition overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge 2015—yes, we all fit back there.” I know that for me, one of those times when I felt full and alive was when my son and I hiked Half Dome together. It wasn’t hiking Half Dome itself that made it so full—although that was pretty spectacular. It was hiking it with him. You look at these responses and you realize that the common denominator of feeling “alive” is being with the people you love and love you—siblings, children, family, good friends, a son, or a crazy group in Israel. To feel alive requires relationship, love, and community. I bet if you looked back at the your best moments, when you felt most alive, someone was there. You take relationships away from even the best experiences, and all you have are isolated and unshared moments that feel a bit hollow. Why is this? Because we were made that way. Life is fundamentally relational, which is why we often feel a loss of life when a loved one dies. Part of us dies.

But it goes much deeper than that. And that’s what I want to point us toward this Easter morning. Jesus was like us, a man of friends and loved ones. He laughed, he lived he loved. And he also wept bitterly in the face of death. And one of those moments was at the death of a close friend by the name of Lazarus—Lazarus about 30 years of age according to church tradition, so it was an untimely death. The story is told in the gospel of John chapter 11. Lazarus’ two sisters Mary and Martha are grieving the loss of their brother. The one that they laughed with, lived with and loved…was gone. They both wished Jesus had made it in time to heal his sickness. But Jesus was too late—four days too late. Lazarus had already been laid in the tomb for four days, which meant that the normal processes of decomposition were already well under way. They knew Jesus could heal. But reverse both the processes and finality of death? Impossible! It’s in this dark context that Jesus says these extraordinary words: “25 I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:45). Like gravity, death drags everyone down. Jesus’ words indicate that he alone stands as death’s Conqueror. Then he proved his words true in two events. First, he went to the tomb of his friend Lazarus and “cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’ 44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go’” (John 11:38-44). The second event was THE event in
which he himself rose from the dead on Easter morning. It was the pivotal moment in history in which God turned the tables on death and opened a way for life—both present and future.

In one sense, the resurrection of Jesus is the promise of physical resurrection at the end of the age—the end of this dark epoch of history. It’s the great hope of the Christian faith that just as Jesus called Lazarus to life and he rose from the dead, so he will in like manner call us to life and we will rise to meet him face to face. That future resurrection is captured in the first statement of Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, yet shall [future tense] he live.” That’s the future awakening in which God’s life gets the final word. All of those who have left us “shall live”—David shall live, Jerry shall live, Craig shall live, Sheila shall live, Nancy shall live, Brian shall live, Ashton shall live, Lorraine shall live, Virgil shall live.

But his resurrection life is also something that we begin to experience in the here and now. That’s captured in the second statement of Jesus that, “…everyone who lives [present tense] and believes [present tense] in me shall never die.” Belief and life go together. And they are both in the present tense.

This is key—and massively important in both our understanding and experience of real life. To believe in Jesus is itself to live. Believing is a way of relating and knowing. It’s personal and it’s relational.

Think of it this way. The person that I trust the most on this planet besides my wife is my father. Not that he’s perfect. But he is trustworthy. Why would I trust him with my life? Because I know him! I know his heart. I know his character. Even more than that, I know he loves me in spite of me (which is saying something). You don’t trust in people you don’t know (unless you’re in a crisis and you have no other choice). And you won’t believe in people who don’t love you. Do you see that believing requires knowing, relating, and loving? Believing in Jesus means knowing him, his heart, his love and entrusting yourself to what he did for you. That itself is life—to know him in faith! To know Christ is to know God. And to know God is to have life. As stated at the beginning, life is fundamentally relational. Later in the gospel Jesus makes this explicit when he says, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

That brings us back to the beginning. What does it meant to truly experience life? We’ve already established the fact that life is relationally conditioned. We feel the fullest and the most alive when we’re with the ones we know and love. But how often do you really feel ALIVE when you’re with loved ones? Probably not all that often! Because we don’t often get along with each other! History will show and our experience will confirm that loved ones are the source of great joy and great pain. People are still mortal, limited, and broken. So life has to come from something deeper.

At the deepest level we were created to relate to God—to find our home in him. To know him is the very essence of life. That’s why he says, I am the resurrection AND the life. And those who have come to believe in Christ in a personal, relational way, new life begins—a deeper life. One such example of this life, from our own church family, that can testify to this life is our brother, Dennis Opolentisima. He’s just one of many, but his story is about how Christ sought him out and brought him to life, woke him up. But listen to it yourself.

[VIDEO]
Dennis O’s story is still being written. He’s in seminary—training to become a pastor or missionary. And yesterday, he actually got married. But his encounter with Jesus changed his life. His encounter with Jesus was life.

This may sound strange at first, but not having a relationship with God is a little bit like a fish trying to live outside of the water. The fish may live for a while, flopping around, laughing and joking with other fish that are out of the water—living in the freedom of a “water-free” life. But life out of the water really isn’t life. It’s the precursor to death. A fish was meant to live in the water. We were meant to live in God and find our life in him. Jesus came to be that for us.

We would love nothing more than for you to enter into the water—to enter into a life-giving relationship with God today. It’s about you and Jesus. A relationship with Jesus will not free you from pain, or heartache or even failure. But it will give you real life in the midst of pain and heartache and failure. And he will walk with you through it as we journey toward the Resurrection.

Maybe you’ve walked away from the Lord for some reason. Or your heart is grown cold. Today is the day, Easter 2015, to come back into the water and live. Or maybe you’ve never had a relationship with God before. This stuff is real. God is real. Christ is real. And life can be found in him—forgiveness, freedom, love, and life. He simply calls you to a relational belief in him. Today is the day to come awake!