

Our Gospel lesson this morning has some very good news for people who are in desperate need of it. And who doesn't long for some good news right now! Here in our text, Jesus makes some promises, some very big promises. He says that everyone who believes in Him will one day see wonderful things, awesome things – the glory of God. This morning we ponder some of the biggest promises in the Bible, and through His Word Jesus fills us with hope that one day we will indeed see the glory of God.

Jesus is at the funeral of His good friend, Lazarus. The time is coming for Jesus to be betrayed and crucified, and that's why this is the Gospel lesson chosen for right before Palm Sunday and Holy Week. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, was filled with grief that her brother had died. But underneath that grief, there was still some faith: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She believed that Jesus could have rescued Lazarus from his illness – that's faith. And then she made a curious statement: "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." What did she mean? Did she believe that Jesus might raise Lazarus from the dead? We're not sure. But we do know that underneath her grief, she had faith.

Isn't that how it is for all of us, as we experience trouble in our lives? Underneath your grief, your anxiety right now, you have faith. That's why you are tuning in and worshipping God right from where you are at. Maybe there are other things weighing heavy on your heart and mind right now in addition to the coronavirus quarantine. Maybe it's the death of a loved one, tension in a relationship with a friend or loved one, loneliness, or a tremendous amount of stress over finances. For many reasons, life can be extremely difficult, and sometimes we feel grief and sadness, like Martha. Life is hard. It brings us many troubles. But underneath our grief and sadness we still have faith in Jesus Christ and all His promises.

Listen to the promises that Jesus gives to Martha: "Your brother will rise again." Martha thought He was talking about the Last Day. In her mind, God the Father would one day end the world and raise everyone from the dead, including Lazarus. She believed that. But it seems that she wasn't picturing **Jesus** as raising anyone from the dead on the Last Day – just God the Father. That's why Jesus spoke these amazing words to her: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Jesus was happy that Martha believed in the Resurrection on the Last Day, but look at me, Jesus is saying. I'm the one who is going to raise all people from the dead, including your brother Lazarus.

And then Jesus makes another promise: “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.” The one who believes in Jesus might die physically. But that person will keep living. When a believer dies, he or she doesn’t really die. The body shuts down, but the soul goes to heaven. A believer’s life improves at death, because in heaven, that person is more alive, more healthy, more filled with joy and awe and excitement than ever before. “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”

And then there’s that other promise Jesus makes: “Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” When Jesus says, “Never die,” He’s talking about what happens on the Last Day, when He raises the believer up from the dead again, and that person becomes physically alive again – body and soul forever and will never die. What amazing promises Jesus makes here: “Do you believe this?” He asked Martha. And Martha said yes. Despite the sadness and anxiety she felt, the grief of losing her brother, she believed. Maybe she didn’t understand everything Jesus was saying, but she believed.

Do you believe? These are big promises. It can be hard, sometimes, to believe, when we’re experiencing grief like Martha, when a loved one suddenly dies, when a successful career suddenly ends, when health is suddenly replaced by illness, when love is replaced by loneliness, when good days are replaced by bad. And let’s get to the heart of what’s on the mind of almost every single person in this whole world right now (!): When will this virus subside? When will all the quarantines be lifted? When will life get back to normal?

Had you had moments of doubt, especially over the past several days, moments of sadness, confusion, and grief? Have you *ever* even wondered if everything you had ever believed about Jesus is actually true? Is there really life after death? Is there really a resurrection from the dead? Is Jesus real? Is everything I have ever believed true? Look at all my problems and troubles. Just look at everything that’s going on in the world right now. Sometimes the promises of God don’t *seem* real.

“**Believe,**” Jesus says, “and you will see the glory of God.” We all have doubts – Martha too. Jesus told the people gathered at the tomb to move the stone away from the entrance, but Martha protested. Wouldn’t you have been a little hesitant too? ‘Yes, I believe you, Jesus,’ Martha must have thought, ‘But really? Open the tomb now? It’s not going to smell very nice, Lord!’ Nevertheless, Jesus gives the Word: They move away the stone, and with one command, Jesus did what He came to do: “Lazarus, come out!” and “The dead

man came out.” Martha saw God’s glory right there – she saw Jesus raise her brother from the dead. She believed and saw the glory of God.

A short time later, during Holy Week, Martha would experience more grief. Instead of her brother dying, she would see Jesus dying, on a cross. Instead of burying Lazarus in a tomb, she would be burying Jesus in a tomb. More heartache for Martha. More grief. More sadness. But maybe for her, the promise of Jesus would echo through her mind, “Believe, and you will see the glory of God.” Would Jesus keep that promise to Martha again? The answer, as you know, is yes. Just as Lazarus walked out of that tomb, Jesus would walk out of His tomb, and revealed to everyone the glory of God. God the Father accepted His Son’s death as the sacrifice for the sins of the world and the Holy Spirit raised Jesus’ from the dead.

This miracle that Jesus performed was recorded for us, to help us believe the promises of God. Like Martha, you and I have witnessed Jesus’ power, through His Word and Means of Grace. Like Martha, we have heard His promises, and today Jesus invites us to believe, and as we do, He promises us that we too will see the glory of God.

Through His Means of Grace, that is, His spoken and written Word and through Absolution, Baptism, and Communion Jesus promises to forgive you all your sins and to be with you always. Do you believe this? One day we all will live in heaven forever, even if we had died on the earth. Do you believe?

One day, you will never die. One day you will be like Lazarus, and Jesus will call out your name, and on the Last Day, and you will come out of your grave, just like Lazarus did, and you will be physically alive again, much healthier, and happier, than when you were the first time you were alive. Jesus promises that you will rise from the dead, just like Lazarus, and you will see the glory of God. Do you believe?

One Day you will be just like Martha, and you will watch Jesus as He displays His power by raising your loved ones from the dead. All those loved ones that you had said goodbye to will rise again come out of the grave, just like Lazarus. Do you believe? All these things are coming, Jesus says, all these things are in the future – believe, and you will see the glory of God.

We will rise! We will rise on the last day; body and soul, to live forever. And we will also rise out of this current health crisis. As God’s Word says in Romans 8:28, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” That’s His promise to you!

Two weeks from now is Easter. There Jesus proves to us that all His promises will come true. Yes, we will all have days like Martha had, that one day many years ago, days filled with grief and fear and confusion and sadness. You and I can't escape those days while we're here on this earth. But Easter is coming. All of Jesus' promises *are* true. May God grant to all of us faith that looks to Jesus every day for strength and comfort. "Believe, and you will see the glory of God." Yes, we will rise! Amen.