

Today we continue our Lenten journey through the Gospel of John. Here in chapter 11, our Lord Jesus makes some amazing promises, including this: Everyone who believes in Him will see awesome things; the glory of God. This morning we consider some of the biggest promises in the whole Bible, and through His Word Jesus fills us with hope that one day we will indeed see the glory of God.

Our rather lengthy Gospel reading we have before us this morning takes us to the village of Bethany where Jesus has just arrived to comfort the family and loved ones of His good friend Lazarus. The time is now drawing near, in fact *very* near, for Jesus to be betrayed, put on trial, and put to death. That's the reason we have this Gospel text just one Sunday before we enter Holy Week.

In our reading we see how Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters, are filled with intense sorrow due to the death of their brother. But underneath of their grief, we see there is still some faith. Martha says these words in verse 21 and Mary later says the exact same words in verse 32: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". Both Martha and Mary believed that the Lord Jesus could have rescued their brother from his illness. That shows that they had faith. Martha, goes on to makes a very curious statement in verse 22. She says, "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." What did she mean by that? Did Martha believe that Jesus might raise Lazarus from the dead? We're not sure. But we do know that underneath her grief, Martha has *faith*.

Isn't that how it is for each of us, as we experience hard times in our lives? Maybe, like Martha and Mary, it's something as devastating as the death of a loved one. Perhaps it's a troubled relationship or a stressful financial situation. Life can be tough, extremely tough, and sometimes we feel grief, stress, and sadness. Life is hard and brings us many troubles as was the case for these two sisters. But underneath of our grief, stress, and sadness, like them, we still have faith in Jesus Christ and His promises.

Listen to the promises that Jesus gives to Martha in verse 23: “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 assuring words to her in verse 25: “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” Jesus was pleased that Martha believed in the Resurrection on the Last Day, but ‘Look at me,’ Jesus is saying. ‘**I am** the one who is going to raise all people from the dead, including your brother Lazarus.’

And then Jesus makes another bold pledge in verse 26: “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.” The one who believes in Jesus may die physically. But that person will keep on living. When a believer dies, he or she doesn’t really die. The body shuts down, but the spirit goes to heaven. A believer’s life improves at death, because in heaven, that person is more alive, more healthy, more filled with joy, 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 the words, “never die,” He’s talking about what happens on the Last Day, when He raises the believer from the dead, and that person becomes physically alive once more – body and soul forever, and will never die. What amazing assurances Jesus gives here! “Do you believe this?” He asks Martha. And Martha says, ‘Yes’. In spite of everything she felt, the grief of losing her brother, she **believed**. Maybe she didn’t completely **understand** everything Jesus was saying, but she **believed**.

Do **you** believe? These are huge promises. And it can be extremely tough to trust in them when we’re experiencing loss and grief like Martha. When a loved one suddenly dies. When a successful career abruptly ends. When good health is unexpectedly replaced by illness. When love is replaced by loneliness. When good

days all of the sudden turn to bad. Have you ever had moments when you doubted God? Maybe it was when you were experiencing so much sadness, so much loneliness, or so much anxiety that you questioned if everything you have ever been taught about Jesus, everything you believed about Him is actually true? Is there really life after death? Is there truly a resurrection from the dead? How is God going to raise my body, revive, and renew it? Is Jesus even real? Is everything I have ever believed accurate? Look at my problems, all of my troubles. Sometimes the promises of God don't feel very real.

“Believe,” Jesus says in verse 40, “and you will see the glory of God.” We all have doubts – Martha did 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 up the tomb? It's not going to smell very nice, Lord! It's been four days!’ 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, along with her sister Mary, saw God's glory right there – they saw Jesus raise their brother from the dead. They both believed and saw the glory of God.

A short time later, during Holy Week, Martha and Mary would experience more grief. But instead of their brother dying, they would see their Lord dying, on a cross. Instead of burying Lazarus in a tomb, they would be burying Jesus in a tomb. More heartache for these sisters. More grief. More sadness. But perhaps for them, the promise of Jesus would echo through their minds, “Believe, and you will see the glory of God.” Would Jesus keep that promise again? The answer, as you know, is a resounding, “Yes!” Just as Lazarus walked out of that tomb, Jesus would walk out of **His** tomb. He 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 for Lazarus was recorded for us, to help us believe the promises of God. Like Martha and Mary, you and I have witnessed Jesus' power, through His Word and Sacraments. Like Lazarus' sisters, we have heard His promises, and today Jesus invites us to believe, and as we do, He assures us that we too will see the glory of God. Through Holy Baptism God has made **you** His beloved child. He promises you - and gives you- the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Do you believe this?

In His holy Supper, Jesus gives you His very body and blood with the bread and wine to forgive your sins and to strengthen your faith in Him. Do you believe this?

Yes, through these means of grace, Jesus promises to be with you always and take care of all your needs of body and soul. Do you believe this?

One day all who trust in Christ will live in heaven, 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, you will come out of your grave, just like Lazarus did. 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, like Lazarus, and you will see the glory of God. Do you believe?

One Day you will be like Martha and Mary, and you will watch Jesus as He displays His power by raising **your** loved ones from the dead. All of those close to you that you have had to say goodbye to, will rise again. They will come out of the graves, 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.

Two weeks from today is Easter. There Jesus proves to us that all of His promises are true. Yes, we will all have days like Martha and Mary 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 in this sinful world. But Easter is coming. All

of Jesus' promises are true; His resurrection confirms it. May God grant all of us faith that looks to Jesus every day for strength and comfort. "Believe, and you **will** see the glory of God." Amen.