

SUNDAY 26 JULY 2020

JESUS: IN HIS OWN WORDS

'I am the resurrection and the life'

*Lord I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance.
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.*

As I come into God's presence, I choose to praise him in the words of Psalm 105:1-5.

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.

²Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.

³Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.

⁵Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered.

The setting of this next claim of Jesus is particularly important. Jesus is standing outside the tomb of his recently deceased friend. Beside him is his friend's distraught sister.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25f)

Thinking about this wider story, can we really believe something like this actually happened? For some people, even those who are eyewitnesses of events that others around them attribute to the miraculous, it is simply impossible to accept that the supernatural can overlap with the natural, that anything can occur for which there is no rational explanation. The only answer to the question of whether this miracle could have occurred is another question: Can we believe that God, acting through Jesus, has power over the course of life and death?

Jesus' claim to be the resurrection and the life is the heart of this story and explains the meaning and import of the miracle, but it is this claim, not the miracle, that has the lasting significance for the life of faith.

When Jesus identifies himself as the resurrection and the life, he uses that image to show what it means that Jesus and God are one. Jesus' self-revelation as the resurrection and the life points to his sharing fully in the power of God. The magnitude of this claim cannot be overstated, because it announces that God's power over life and death, a central belief of Old Testament faith (e.g., 2 Kings 5:7; Ezekiel 39:3-12) is now shared with Jesus. When we see and hear Jesus, we do not see and hear God in some static sense, we see God's will for the salvation of the world at work.

Jesus' self-revelation as the resurrection and the life is the decisive announcement of this Gospel. His full share in God's power over life and death marks the beginning of God's new age, the age in which God's hope for the world becomes a reality. What God wills and hopes for the life of the world is now available in Jesus—that is, the defeat of death's power to remove people from life with God. In Jesus the power of death to separate people from God is reduced to nothing. This defeat is no longer merely a promise; it is a reality.

Verses 25b and 26a are the most far-reaching promise anywhere in the Gospel of what relationship with Jesus offers those who embrace it. It is one with the promises of living water (4:10, 14; 7:37–38), living bread (6:33, 35, 51), and even eternal life (3:15; 6:47; 10:28), but supersedes all those earlier promises by confronting head on the question of death. They are not idle words of hope. They offer a vision of life to the believer in which our days do not need to be reckoned by the inevitable power of death, but instead by the irrevocable promise of life with God. The dual image of resurrection and life invite us to a vision of life in which we remain in the full presence of God during life, and after death.

We pause and pray, giving thanks to God for this new life.

Pause and pray

The promise of John 11:25f is also an invitation, made explicit in Jesus' question in 26: "Do you believe this?" Faith is seen here as more than acceptance of a proposition. Martha, after all, accepted Jesus' words as 'true', but she still tried to prevent him opening the tomb. When Jesus asks, "Do you believe this?" he is not asking if we think his claim is reasonable and rational, he is asking us to put our faith in him, and trust that he is able and willing to do as he has promised.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1)

*In all my thoughts, may I think of you;
In all my words, may I speak of you;
In all my actions, may I act as you;
In all my interactions, may I love like you;
In everything, may I look like you,
More and more each day.
Amen.*