

Lent 5 / March 22, 2026

John 11:27

*“Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”*

What is the most important question you have been asked? We are asked important questions throughout our lives. Sometimes we are afraid to give an answer, like when our mother caught us with our hand in the cookie jar and asked “What are you doing?” Sometimes we are happy to give an answer, like when the minister asked “*Do you take this man, this woman, to be your lawfully wedded spouse?*” Sometimes we may not know what to say, like when someone asks who we are going to vote for in an election. Life is filled with questions.

Nevertheless, there is no question more important than the question Jesus asks Martha in our gospel when he says, “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*” Although directed at Martha in our gospel this is a question Jesus asks each of us, not once but many times in the course of our lives. He asks at our baptism and whenever we remember and return to our baptism in repentance. He asks at our confirmation, whenever we have the opportunity to share our faith and whenever someone asks us to give an account of the hope we have in Him.

We are asked many questions in the course of a day, let alone in the course of a lifetime, especially if we work with children, have young children or grand-children; questions like why is the sky blue, what makes the world go around. With some questions it makes little difference whether we know the answer or not. But the question Jesus asks has eternal implications. He asks a question that has meaning for time and for eternity: “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and everyone who believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*” There is no greater question and no greater gift of the Spirit than the gift of faith and the blessing of

confessing Christ as Saviour and Lord and saying with Martha, *“Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world.”* Because, whoever believes in Him has eternal life and He will raise us up on the Last Day.

Faith in God, the power and promise of His love is central to the scriptures. God wants people to believe in Him and believe the promises of His love and salvation, especially the promise of His love and salvation in Christ Jesus. God wanted ancient Judah to believe that He was with them in exile in Babylon and that He had the power to raise them from their national grave, restore and return them to the Promised Land. It was hard to believe. It had never happened before that an exiled people was restored and returned to their land. Exile was a national genocide, practiced by empires to destroy conquered peoples completely. Nations taken into exile had no hope of return and little hope of maintaining their identity in exile. They were indeed cut off. Other exiled nations had no hope, but the Jews in exile had the Lord and for that reason had a real and living hope of national resurrection and return to the Promised Land. The Lord wanted the Jews in exile to believe Him and by restoring Judah to the land of promise the Lord gave them reason to believe. In words recorded in Ezekiel He said, *“And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord...”* He showed the power of His word.

It's not easy to believe when it seems our hope is gone and we are indeed cut off, be it from the Promised Land as was ancient Judah, or from a loved one at the time of death, as were Martha and Mary. There is no place more fearful and sadder than the death bed of a loved one. There is no place lonelier and bereft of hope than the grave of a loved one. Martha and then Mary both said to Jesus, *“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.”* Few things test our faith more than death and grief. At the saddest time in her life and in the loneliest place physically and spiritually, Jesus asked Martha if she believed in the promise of His love and in His power to raise the dead. He asks us the

same question in the same times and places, *“Do you believe this?”* Praise God, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to believe and our mouths to confess, *“Yes Lord. I believe that you are the Christ the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”* In this faith we are saved and in this faith we have hope and peace.

We often hear this gospel read at funerals. It lends itself to that since it deals with death and takes place in a cemetery. But there is one funeral at which we will not hear these words. Do you know the one of which I speak? Of course it will be our own. Our death is not something we look forward to, under normal circumstances, but rather something from which we look away. We don't like to think about it. Pain and despair can colour our perception and in an unnatural way make death seem appealing, as a means of escape from suffering and relief from pain. But generally speaking, psychologically balanced people don't look forward to death, but rather actively avoid it and consciously put it out of mind. One hundred-year-olds probably find comfort in their death related anxiety by thinking, *“Well, some people have lived to be 120.”* Poor Lazarus, he had to go through it twice!

As much as the words of our gospel are a comfort as we grieve the death of loved ones, they give us hope and in them we find strength as we deal with the 'distant possibility' of our own earthly demise. When our time comes as it most certainly will, these words will give us peace, because they assure us of our salvation in Christ Jesus. Hear what Jesus says, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”* The promise of resurrection and eternal life are central to the words of Jesus. He didn't speak like this once or twice, but often. Five chapters earlier Jesus said, *“For this is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life and I will raise Him up on the last day.”* And to show the truth and the power of His word to do what He promised, He raised Lazarus from the dead and called Him from the grave. He did this so we would

trust His words, put our faith in Him and believe that He is the resurrection and the life.

It sounds easy, just believe it, right? Some things are easier said than done. It's not always easy to believe. Martha and Mary were challenged in their faith when Jesus delayed several days after they called Him and didn't arrive until Lazarus was on his fourth day in the grave. Jesus told another man who had brought his son for healing, "*All things are possible for him who believes.*" That man cried out, "*I believe. Help my unbelief.*" There is a part of us that doubts and so we may wonder if we will have faith to meet the test when death comes to loved ones and grief comes to us. There is a part of us that worries if we will have faith to believe when our time comes. With the disciples we pray "*Lord, increase our faith.*" It's easy to think faith is our work rather than the work of the Holy Spirit and worry we won't have faith when we need it most. We need to remember faith is not something we do, as if we have to somehow exert ourselves to believe. Faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit gives that gift freely and continuously through the word. The Lord will never fail to answer our prayers and will always give us faith to believe, especially when we need it the most.

Faith comes by hearing the word of God and so if we are concerned about our salvation, about having faith to believe, we can ensure that we have faith at all times by abiding in the word of God, hearing it in worship, reading it in the scriptures, remembering it in the promise of our baptism, receiving it in the gift of Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion. God gives these means of grace for the specific purpose of creating and sustaining faith, so that we would believe in Christ our Saviour and be strong in the promise of His love. If we want our bodies to be strong, we have to exercise and eat healthy food. Spiritual strength comes from exercising our faith, doing as Jesus said and taking up our cross every day and following Him. Spiritual health comes from the good nutrition of God's word. We nourish our faith by feasting richly on His word, the most nutritional food a believer can eat. The Lord says, "*Man*

*does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus’ words are powerful to create, nourish and sustain faith, give forgiveness and eternal life.

Many people, even some of Jesus’ disciples, turned away when He called Himself the living bread from heaven, which a person may eat and live forever. Jesus asked the twelve a question similar to the one He asked Martha in our gospel. He asked if they also wanted to leave. Like Martha the Holy Spirit gave them faith to believe and they replied, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we know and we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God.”* Jesus is the Holy One of God, the Son who has come from God to give forgiveness, faith and resurrection to eternal life to all who believe. When sin, sadness, grief and death challenge our faith, the Holy Spirit gives us faith to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and that we and all who believe in Him have peace with God, forgiveness, hope in death and the promise of rising in Him to a new and eternal life. Jesus is our confidence. In His name. Amen

The God of hope give us faith and confidence in believing in Jesus by His Holy Spirit. Amen