John 11:17-28

I would like to start out by sharing a story with you about a man named Dmitri, taken from the book, The Insanity of God, A True Story of Faith Resurrected.

“The authorities moved Dmitri a thousand kilometers away from his family and locked him in a prison. His cell was so tiny that it was but a single step to either side. Even worse, according to Dmitri, he was the only believer among fifteen hundred hardened criminals.

Dmitri pointed to two reasons for his strength in the face of torture. For seventeen years in prison, every morning at daybreak, Dmitri would stand at attention by his bed. He would face the east, raise his arms in praise to God, and then he would sing a song to Jesus, he called his HeartSong. The reaction of the other prisoners was predictable. The other prisoners banged metals cups. They threw food and sometimes human waste to try to shut him up.

There was another custom that Dmitri had. Whenever he found a scrap of paper, he would sneak it back to his cell. There he would pull out a stub of a pencil, and he would write on that scrap of paper, as tiny as he could, all the Bible verses he could remember. When the scrap was completely filled, he would walk to the corner of his little jail cell where there was a concrete pillar that constantly dripped water— reach as high as he possibly could, and stick it on that damp pillar as a praise offering to God.

Of course, whenever one of his jailers spotted a piece of paper on the pillar, he would come into his cell, take it down, read it, beat Dmitri severely, and threaten him with death. Still, every day, he rose at dawn to sing his song. And every time he found a scrap of paper, he filled it with Scripture.

This went on year after year after year. The authorities did unspeakable things to his family. At one point, they even led him to believe that his wife had been murdered and that his children had been taken by the state. They taunted him cruelly, “We have ruined your home. Your family is gone.” Dmitri’s resolve finally broke. He told God that he could not take any more.

He admitted to his guards, “You win! I will sign any confession that you want me to sign. I must get out of here to find out where my children are.” They told Dmitri, “We will prepare your confession tonight, and then you will sign it tomorrow. Then you will be free to go.”

After all those years, the only thing that he had to do was sign his name on a document saying that he was not a believer in Jesus and that he was a paid agent of the western governments trying to destroy the USSR.

That very night he sat in his jail cell. He was in deep despair, grieving the fact that he had given up. At that same moment, a thousand kilometers away his family.

Dmitri’s wife, his children who were growing up without him, and his brother— sensed through the Holy Spirit the a deep need to pray. They knelt in a circle and began to pray out loud for him.

Miraculously, the Holy Spirit of the Living God allowed Dmitri to hear the voices of his loved ones as they prayed. The next morning, when the guards marched into his cell with the documents, Dmitri’s back was straight. His shoulders were squared and there was strength on his face and in his eyes. And he said ….  “I am not signing anything!”

The guards were incredulous. “What happened?” they demanded to know. Dmitri smiled and told them, “In the night, God let me hear the voices of my wife and my children and my brother praying for me. You lied to me! I now know that my wife is alive. I know that my sons are with her. I also know that they are all still in Christ. So I am not signing anything!”

A few days following, he was overwhelmed by a special gift from God. In the prison yard, he found a whole sheet of paper with a pencil beside it! Later that night he wrote every Scripture reference, every Bible verse, every story, and every song he could recall.

He then stuck the entire sheet of paper on that wet concrete pillar. Stood and looked at it: to him it seemed like the greatest offering he could give Jesus from that prison cell.

Of course, the jailor saw it. He was beaten within an inch of his life. And was told he would be executed. And as he was dragged out of his cell, down the corridor, to the center of the prison where he would be killed, the strangest thing happened.

Before they reached the door leading to the courtyard— before stepping out into the place of execution— fifteen hundred hardened criminals stood at attention by their beds. They faced the east and they began to sing the song they had heard Dmitri sing for so long to Jesus every single morning, his HeartSong.

Dmitri’s jailers instantly released their hold on his arms and stepped away from him in terror. One of them demanded to know, “Who are you?” Dmitri straightened his back and stood as tall and as proud as he could. He responded: “I am an adopted child of the Living God, saved by the blood of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, Jesus Christ, is His name!”

The guards returned him to his cell. Sometime later, Dmitri was released and returned to his family.

Perhaps you are wondering if you would be able to suffer for your faith? Could you stand with back straight and shoulders squared for Christ?

A couple weeks ago I watched a movie called “Unashamed”. It was about the Columbine High School massacre - where 2 young teenagers filled with hate came into a High School and started shooting people.

 One of the first people they came across was Rachel Joy Scott. Just a couple days before, Rachel had tried to talk to them and befriend them, and encourage them to leave their hateful feelings and turn to Jesus. But they hated her more and more and even made videotapes mocking her christianity.

On the day they shot her in the leg twice and then shot her again in the back. When they began to leave they noticed she was still alive, and walked back grabbed her by the hair. Lifted up her head and asked her, “Do you still believe in your God?”

Her response was unflinching, ”You Know I Do”, they responded “Then go be with Him,” …. and shot her in the head.

Would you would be able to do that? Have you ever wondered if you could look fear in the face? I have. The answer today is probably a very shaky I hope so, or I am not sure. And that makes sense, do you know why? Because none of us are being called to do that right here, right now!

But if the day comes, I am believing God and hoping against hope that the grace will come filled with a special mercy to give me strength to endure. I am praying the same thing for you.

Still, we need not think about only the big, definitive moments like that of being tempted to deny Jesus or suffer greatly. Think also or even mainly, about all of the smaller, more frequent temptations to minimize or ignore or deny Jesus on a day in and day out basis.

How many times do we keep our mouths shout, how many times does the Holy Spirit prod us to share the gospel with someone or to be more bold, and we just ignore it. How many times do we not want to seem weird or not be embarrassed? How many of the people that we interact with do we know about their eternity? Shouldn’t we care enough about the people we care about to know whether they are going to heaven or hell?

I have heard it said “that pride causes us to care more about what our non-christian friends think of us than what God will do to them in their sin.”

Do we love people enough to not be liked or not accepted by them?

One of the profound things that I read in the Insanity of God that believers being persecuted for their faith would want to say to us Christians who are not being persecuted is, “Don’t give up in your freedom what we are unwilling to give up in our persecution"

In other words. They are being persecuted for sharing their faith, and speaking about Christ. If they quit doing that they would quit being persecuted. But since they will not quit doing that, they are persecuted. Their plea to us is to not quit sharing Christ with others.

You will be given enough grace. There is power to be had to live for Christ even now.

You see, the resurrection isn’t just something that motivates us for what will be will …. the resurrection is also about the here and now.

The living Christ, the resurrected Lord – is here with us, every minute of every hour of every day. That’s what I want us to see today … that’s what John chapter 11 is here to tell us today … he gives us strength for every moment.

You might say, well how is that so?

Well, let me tell you First, just a basic question we all have. Can Jesus help us?

Listen to what Jesus says to Martha in vs. 25 - "“I am the resurrection and the life.[d] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

If Jesus is the resurrection – what does that mean? It means he has gone beyond life. Not merely for this moment but for all of eternity. And this is what is being declared. That’s what this passage is here for - reminding us that the reason Jesus can help us because Jesus is Lord.

It is what Martha makes clear in vs. 27 … She simply says, “Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world!”

He of course, giving her good reason to believe.

and vs. 38-44

And because we kind of know the story we sometimes miss the details. Lazarus has been in the grave for 4 days and though it is kind of gross to think about. He smells! “No don’t take the stone away,” they say. “He really is dead. It’s going to stink!”

And Jesus says, “come out…” And He does. Here is the power of God on display. The power over the dead. But it’s not just power – it’s focused power.

 He says, “Lazarus come out” … if He didn’t specifically say Lazarus, he had the power for everybody to come out of their graves. It would have been kind of crowded all of a sudden.

It will be one day, you know. When he descends with the sound of a trumpet and the cry of a archangel and the dead in Christ will be raised. But here is just a taste of his power on display.

Can He help? Yes. He can help. Because He is God. And he has immense power. Even the power of life and death. Even more than that. He has the power to use it wisely and well.

Not only is their power on display but there is foreknowledge. When the disciples heard the news that Lazarus was ill, Jesus said at the end of vs. 4 … “this illness will not lead to death…” Now how did he know that?

Because he is not bound by human limitations at all. Later on, the word comes that Lazarus has died and vs. 23, Jesus says “your brother will rise again” …. He knows what is going to happen.

Now remember in vs. 11 he says, “Lazarus has fallen asleep” Though he is another town without any of the modern communication devices we have. He says, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”

But what you may not understand is how vast his foreknowledge. Not in the gospel of John .... but in Luke 16, Jesus tells a story. There are two men. One a rich man who dies and does not go to heaven. There is a poor man who sat at his gate day after day. Being ignored by the rich man and that poor man dies.

 And he goes to the bosom of Abraham. To heaven, as the Jews would understand it. And ultimately the rich man says to Abraham, would you send that poor man back to speak to my brothers and when he warns them about the hell that I am in, they will turn to God.

 And Jesus says in the parable, “oh no they won’t…” If they did not believe Moses and the prophets, they will not believe this man – even if he were to rise from the dead…”

 Now that account was told weeks before. And just for what it is worth. What was the name of the poor man in the parable \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? It was Lazarus.

 Now. Here he actually rises from the dead and everybody believes and now follows Jesus right? No.

Jesus gave the parable weeks ahead of time. Knowing not only that Lazarus would rise from the dead but that soon he would rise from the dead as well. He knew it all.

It is God saying to you and to me through his son Jesus - the reason you know that I can help is because I am the resurrection. I have power and I know how to use it.

 And the reason that you and I have to know this -  is there are times in our lives when we actually believe that hope is gone. That we don’t have the ability to get up again.

The marriage is broken. The child is gone. The job is done. The reputation is ruined and we think it is all over.

 And we, though we know all the bible stories – wonder, can God really help???

What’s the answer? Yes HE Can!

Jesus is the resurrection. He can bring life to that which was dead and he can heal what was broken, he can change what has been ruined. It is his very nature. It can be as bad as you can possibly imagine and He can make it right again.

 And so our question of course, “well – if he has that power. Does he care to use it?”

Not just does he have the power but does He care?

What does John tell us? He cares.

The evidence of course is, if He is God – it is a wonder that He is here. I mean. He is the king of glory but here he is in this story, in the flesh among his people. How awesome is that?

 Him humbling himself, leaving his royal robes of heaven, and becoming a man - is evidence of a God who cares.

 And unless we miss it. The greatest evidence in this passage that he really cares is that he cries.

 John 11:35 - Jesus did what? He wept. Jesus wept.

Does He care. Because this might sound a little simple. We might need to look a little more deeply. Look at verse 33 …. Look again in verse 38

 Then Jesus deeply moved again came to the tomb. Now when we hear these words “deeply moved” … what we immediately think according to our senses is that he is emotionally torn up.

Would it help you to know, that these words “deeply moved” are actually a jewish phrase for the snorting of a horse. You ever see a horse be tried to be made to do something when it doesn’t want to … and it snorts … that’s what this phrase means, “and he was deeply moved

It actually does not so much mean sympathetic grief as it means indignation… anger … rage!

 Jesus is showing he cares not just by his tears but by his anger. Here he is, declaring himself to be the resurrection ... and people are still wondering. Well if he could have healed the blind man, surely he could have healed this man ... and disbelief is on display but its more than that – death is on display.

Here is the impact of evil in its greatest expression. Here is what sin has done to break and hurt people. It is death before him and the creator God who has made all things is angry!!

 This isn’t right. This is not the way I made things.

 And so he not only weeps in grief. He shows the rage that we all should feel at the brokenness. It’s our own hearts true feelings. At the moments of deepest grief.

 We have tears and at the same moment, sometimes deeply buried, sometimes not just tears … we also have anger. This isn’t right. This isn’t the way things are supposed to be. And we actually want to curl up our fist and punch something!

 And the fact that Jesus would feel that, says He knows what I feel. I know what Jesus feels here. I have been through it. And he knows what I feel.

 He is able to be touched with the feelings of our afflictions. What difference does it make?

 The other day I was reading of a Pastor whose daughter has cancer … maybe you can relate … I can. I lost a two year old son to a horrible disease … And every day I have an 8 yr. old daughter …  who is wracked by seizures.

But he wrote this …. see if you can relate.

“When my daughter was diagnosed with cancer I read many articles about suffering and dealing with tragedy. I was left feeling like the authors did not really understand what I was going through. They all quoted the Bible a lot but I have a theology degree and I’ve read the Bible too. I already knew that God loved me, that He provides for the sparrow, I knew that Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus. I knew that God was going to win in the end - but I also knew that my kid had cancer!!! … and was dying..

And I felt so alone. I could not figure out how I am supposed to feel about this.  And then some guy on the radio provided the missing piece pointed – he said there is not a good way to go through something like this. Because as a human being I was not built for this, this is not the way the good world that God revealed is supposed to be. Cancer in children is a foreign invader. We can’t reconcile ourselves to this. We are members and made for God’s good creation, not this evil, not this sin, not this darkness.

It would be like getting a handful of dirt in your eye and saying, that’s ok.

No! That makes no sense!

Nothing will be as it is supposed to be until you get that sand out. And I am no more built for watching my 5 yr old battle with cancer than my eyes are designed for sand.

 Suddenly, I knew something more than hold on Jesus wins in the end. He came not just so you and I can go to Heaven one day but because this world is broken. And the resurrection is what is needed to fix it. And He provided that. His incarnation and His resurrection hit the ground on my street like I never experienced before. I knew it might not mean that my daughter would be healed but I knew that Jesus was weeping and I knew He feels the same RAGE towards evil and suffering that I do. And finally I understood Jesus because I knew He understood me.”

Does He care? He cares not only enough to grieve but to be outraged at the brokenness that hurts us and this world so much.

So the question is, if He cares and He has power, then what is going to motivate Him to use it well and rightly.

That’s the harder question. But it is answered here. Part of it is found in vs. 4

What is Jesus motivation in healing Lazarus? His own glory.

 Now we have to understand that this is so foreign to human wisdom. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he went right away – didn’t he? No. What did he do. He stayed where he was 2 more days.

 No. No. Jesus. Your friend is ill. People are hurting. You are supposed to go right away. But Jesus said. “No – this is done, so that the glory of God may be revealed in him.

And so against human wisdom, he does not fix it right away. No when he gets there, Mary and Martha… both said the same thing, … “Jesus – if you’d been here, he would not have died” Lord. Why didn’t you come earlier? Why didn’t you fix this as we think is right? Why didn’t you do that? Why does he have to be in the grave 4 days.

Why did Jesus do that? So that the glory of God would be most fully revealed. It happens against wisdom. It happens against our understanding. But ultimately – looking back, we see it.

 Now, when He says, “Lazarus come forth…” we know there is true power and glory on display.

 There is hope for generations, for centuries to come.

 Because Jesus showed the glory of his own Lordship in those moments. And what everybody would have said was the wrong way to do it - He alone knew what was right and what was needed for the very most of eternal purposes.

 And I know it seems wrong. I can say the words that preachers are supposed to say. He did it for His own glory. What is God’s ultimate motivation always? His own glory.

 And we think, isn’t that kind of egotistical? Well, not if His other motivation is not just His glory but our good. Why do we paint road signs? Why are airplane landing ways all lit up? Because that which can help, we want to be spot lighted. Why does God take so much care to spotlight His own glory?

So that we who need it, will know where to turn. So we who need eternity will face Him through the worse crisis of life. We will know the one with the glory is the one willing to help.

 And he showed us that He is willing to help.

 When he says, vs. 25 …. Jesus says to Martha “I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live..”

He that lives and believes in me shall never die.

He is not just motivated by His glory but our good. Here in this broken, fallen, evil, dark world. He can take a Dmitri, or a Rachel Joy Scott, whose deaths seemed so meaningless and make the glory of God shine.

 To recognize that God can stand with someone in the worst of human experiences, so that that person can be a witness to the sufficiency of Christ – that our hope is not in this broken world right now. What happens now is not the final picture.

 We by faithfulness in the worst of times. We by hope in times that make no sense.

 Are turning people, are turning our hearts to what is eternal.

Even the one who is the resurrection said, “if you believe in me – you will never die”

That this world is not the final chapter. The experience of hurting, difficulties and decay that are here are not the final thing that is being said.

But rather God by working through his people – in his people according to his time, his wisdom, is accomplishing eternal purposes. That the resurrection is not just out there somewhere. It is right here, right now. God is at work because Jesus is the resurrection!

 No one has taught me better than people who have ministered in the most trying of conditions.

In the book “A Thousand Resurrections” Maria describes 30 yrs of ministering in the inner city.

She writes “I did not know that we would scrape by just above the poverty line for years. That I would live with people who heard voices and spent most of their lives in jail or prsion.

That I would share a home with women who sold their bodies and snorted cocaine or whose boyfriends choked them.

That we would be robbed over and over and that we would have a chance to give a second chance to young people who had gone through it all. I did not know that my children would be poisoned. That their friends who ate at our table would not go to college but to prison.

 That a little boy with no Daddy at home who would had baked cookies in our kitchen and hunted snakes with my son would one day lie on the street in a pool of blood.

I did not know that when I was scraped raw – Jesus would heal me. That when I was broken. God would use my brokenness. That he would use it in spite of ourselves. That Jesus would shine so clearly. That light could spring up out of darkness and death and give people hope again.

 I did not know that I would witness a thousand resurrections. That church members who struggled to pay the rent would adopt nieces and nephews to save them from drug addicted parents.

 That women who saw a teenage mother roll her babies stroller into an empty house and leave it. That, that same witness would raise that baby as her own. That men who snorted cocaine could get clean and love Jesus. That women sexually abused by their fathers could be healed and rescue other children from the same.

 I did not know that all these people would be my heroes and ultimately my friends. Because they would know Jesus sometimes better than I.

 I have witnessed a thousand resurrections. None greater than my own. I have hope again.”

I believe a God that can reach into darkness, into the death and save people.

Why? Because he is the resurrection! Because it is not just something out there some time. It is the reality of whom the God we are united to and if we believe in Him. His reality, His wisdom, His power, His glory is at work in and through us today. Right here, right now.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life and whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Do you believe this? Do you believe it?   If you do would you pray with me right now.