

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus says to us, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

This is why we are here tonight. We came to hear these words. We are here to receive comfort in a time of heartache. We came to find peace in a time of tragedy. We came to be like a little child who is afraid getting a big hug from their father and hearing him say in our ears, "Don't be afraid, I am here for you." And his arms are wide open this evening waiting to hold on to you.

Our text for tonight is from John 11. Jesus is going to a funeral of Lazarus. He was sick, and he died. And as Jesus is approaching the town Lazarus' sister Martha comes out to meet him. And the first thing that she says to him is

"Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died."

When Jesus meets Mary, Lazarus' other sister, the first thing that she says to him is "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." She was crying. Jesus saw her crying, and he was deeply moved. He saw where Lazarus was laid, and Jesus wept because Jesus loved him. The love that Jesus had for his friend was evident to everyone there. But some people said,

"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

And that's maybe there is a voice inside your head that is saying the same thing. "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept these from dying?" You tell that voice to be quiet. You tell Satan to get out of your head and to stop standing between you and the outstretched hands of your Savior. He loves you. He loves every one of his creation. Don't you dare let him go of him when you need him the most. Hold on to Jesus. Hold on to him and let him comfort you. Let him wrap you in the promises of his word.

Jesus cried because this isn't what he wanted for his creation. Death was not what he wanted for any of us. He wanted us all to live forever with him in heaven. Death causes us pain. But Jesus gives us comfort.

Our epistle lesson tonight was from Ephesians chapter 6.

"Put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground, stand firm."

A day of evil is here today. One sick man through his actions ended the lives of at least 58 people, injured hundreds, and affected the lives of family, friends, and this whole community. One man did all of that evil. But he is nothing compared to our God.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

That is a promise from Jesus. He didn't come to this world just to help the blind see. He didn't come just to heal the sick, or feed the hungry, or to teach us how to treat each other. He came to destroy the power that death held over us. He came to take away the worst weapon death had. Death might separate us from our family, or our friends, but it cannot separate us from the love of our God because Jesus accomplished his goal. He defeated death on Easter morning once and for all. There is peace in him, even when there is chaos here. There is life in him, even when there is death here on this earth. Hold on to him through the tears. Hold on to those promises that aren't ever going to change. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."

He promised that to Mary and Martha. Then he went to the tomb and told them to roll back the stone. And so that those who were there that day and we who are sitting here tonight would believe in him, he said to Lazarus, "come out." And the dead arose. Lazarus came back to life.

Jesus never makes an empty promise. He always comes through. He raised Lazarus from the dead because he has the power of death. On Easter Sunday he rose from the dead victorious because death is nothing in comparison to the love that our God has for us. Death isn't the end. God

has the power over death and he gives that power to those who believe in him.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
Isaiah 40

The love that Jesus has for us, it transforms us. It changes us from people who fear death, to people who look forward to eternal life. It changes us from people who are afraid of the evil one, to those who know that God is on our side and he cannot be defeated. It changes us from sinners who feared and hated God into his children who he holds close to him. It changes strangers into family. And when times get tough you need to your family. The people here tonight are family. They are members of your community who need love and support.

We hold on to each other through comforting hugs and words of encouragement from God's word. We have more than just it's going to be ok. We have promises from God that can never be broken. God is our refuge and strength an ever-present help in trouble. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. He is the resurrection and the life. And that is what is ahead of us on the horizon.

He is in control. Not maniacs. We need to be reminded that even though there will still be tragedies here on this earth, this is not the last one, that awaiting us one day is an eternity without pain, heartache, loss, grief, anger, confusion, and death because he says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

One day, for some in our community, today, with outstretched hands he embraced his children. He welcomed them to everlasting life. Hold on to him when things are tough. Hold on to each other when you are feeling down. He is always holding on to you and will never let you go.

Amen.