

The Holy Funeral of Carlos Ruiz
John 11:17-44

Dear family and friends of Carlos, grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is the resurrection and the life. I've only met a few of you. I've known Josh, or Pastor DeYoung, since the summer of 2014, but the few of you I've met, I've only just become acquainted with you for less than a month. We met because Carlos was dying. I saw your love Carlos in the way you cared for him as he was dying. And I see your love for Carlos today because you are here. It was my joy to bring the Word of God to Carlos as he was dying. It is my joy to bring the Word of God to you today. The Word that I brought to Carlos on his deathbed is the same Word that I bring to you today. The Gospel reading today from John 11 is the Word of God that Carlos heard as he was dying. It is the same Word that you need to hear.

First, Carlos died in Christ. He confessed Jesus as the resurrection and the life, as the Messiah who came into the world to save us from our sin. He also confessed his sins and received the holy absolution. Carlos is at peace. His suffering is at an end and he is present with his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus has given Carlos the victory over sin, death, and the devil. I want you to have this victory as well.

I chose this passage for Carlos because it teaches us three important things. First, you must confess Christ. Second, Jesus cares about you. And third, Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

You hear in the text today that Jesus came to the funeral of Lazarus, His dear friend. What you didn't hear happens right before our reading. Jesus delays His coming to Mary and Martha until Lazarus has died. He could have come earlier and healed Lazarus, but He waits. Even Martha knows this. She says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (v. 21) Mary and Martha had sent for Jesus hoping that He would come in time to do another one of His miracles. But Jesus delays showing us that death is inevitable for all of us. Carlos has faced his death. You too must face yours.

You will indeed face death. Dr. Luther, who restored the Gospel to the church, put it this way:

"The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Everyone must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone. We can shout into another's ears, but everyone must himself be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be

with you then, nor you with me. Therefore everyone must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian.”¹

You must face death. But only a Christian is equipped to face death.

Death came into the world because of sin. God created Adam and Eve sinless. Unlike anyone else, apart from Christ, they were created with the ability chose good or evil. They were deceived by the devil and chose evil. And then they were condemned to death. And they condemned you and I to death. You and I inherited their sinful condition and have no choice. Born in our natural state we only chose evil. We prove it all the time. We curse instead of blessing. We hate instead of loving. We covet instead of being content. We fall prey to our insatiable appetites. It doesn't matter if our appetite is bent towards gluttony or sexual perversion or vainglory. We cannot help it! We fall prey to our God forsaken desires. We prove time and again that we are children of Adam and Eve. We prove time and again that we are children of wrath.

That is why Jesus says we must be born again. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He repeats Himself, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3, 5) Here Jesus equates water baptism with being born again. You must be baptized. But that is only half the story. Jesus also says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16) But you cannot believe apart from baptism. You must receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism so that you believe. Apart from God we can do nothing. But with the Holy Spirit, we can and do believe in Jesus.

What would someone say that you believe if they observed you for a week? A month? A year? If you profess to be a Christian, would someone observing your life know that you belong to Christ?

Martha has a beautiful confession of faith. When Jesus says to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. 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?” (vv. 25-26)

Before I got to Martha's reply, when I was reading this to Carlos, he spontaneously cried out, “Yes. Yes I believe this. I believe it with my whole heart!”

¹ Eight Sermons at Wittenberg, “Invocabit” sermons, AE, pg70

And when I read Martha's reply to Jesus, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Carlos couldn't help but break in here as well and said, "Yes, Yes I believe this."

Just like Martha, Carlos confessed his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And just like Martha, Carlos is saved eternally from death.

Jesus didn't just say that He was the resurrection and the life. He shows it. He takes Mary and Martha and the Jews who were with them to the tomb of Lazarus. Mary and Martha and their family and friends were grieving just like you are grieving over the death of your dear Carlos. On their way to the tomb, something incredible happens. "Jesus wept." (v. 35)

Jesus is God. He created the universe. He created Adam and Eve and you and me. He sustains everyday life with His mighty power. But He is not a God who is far off. He did not leave us to struggle with sin, death, and the devil on our own. You and I are no match for these staggering enemies. Even if you are a Christian, you fall prey to temptation and sin. Even if you are a Christian, you will face your own death. Especially as a Christian, Satan is hell bent on your destruction. God knows your weakness. He knows that you are dust. And to dust you shall return. (Psalm 103)

Jesus wept. He cares about you. He cares about your struggles. He numbers every hair on your head. "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26) Listen to these amazing words from God Himself:

"The Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted... I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palm of My hands." (Isaiah 49:13, 16)

Jesus cares for you and joined Himself to His creation by being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He joins you in the muck and mire of your daily life. He joins you in your suffering. Yet He was born without sin. John the Baptist testified of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Jesus took away the sting of death by dying in your place suffering the full wrath of God the Father. Jesus engraved you on the palm of His hand by dying for you on a cross. He faced the full wrath of God the Father for your sin so that you don't have to. He did what you and I could not do, pay the price for our sin.

He gives forgiveness of sin as a gift. You cannot earn the forgiveness of sin through your works, or money, or intellect. You must receive it as a gift. St. Paul says it this way:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

God is overflowing with His grace. He doesn't just deliver the forgiveness of sins through baptism, which He certainly does. He doesn't just deliver the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper where He distributes His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith, which He certainly does. He also delivers the forgiveness of sins through ordinary pastors. When an ordained man of God says, in the stead and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, “I forgive you all your sins,” they are forgiven. God is rich in His mercy and abundant with His grace.

Carlos confessed his sins to me and received the holy absolution. His sin was covered by the blood of Jesus. He died in peace. The peace that can only come from God.

Jesus proved that He was God. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, He proved that He has the power over life and death. Others raised people from the dead. Elijah and Peter also raised people from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit. But they are not the Lord of life. They were His messengers. But Jesus is the author of life. He not only raised Lazarus from the dead, but He raised Himself from the dead. Elijah and Peter died and are with the Lord in the same way that Carlos is with the Lord. But Jesus is alive unlike anyone else. He showed Himself alive in His body to over 500 witnesses. There is more testimony of the resurrection of Jesus than of anything else in antiquity. The resurrection is proof that God has engraved you on the palm of His hand.

You will grieve over losing Carlos. It is good to grieve for those we love and miss. When you are overwhelmed by your grief, I want you to pull out today's bulletin and read the portion from John 11. And I want you to focus on these words that I leave you with:

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. 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?”