

Do you believe this?

A poem/sermon on John 11:1-45 by Nathan Nettleton, 2 April 2017

© LaughingBird.net

Message

Jesus calls us to believe that he is the resurrection and the life, not just in theory, but in relation to everything that is dead or dying within us.

Sermon

His question was simple enough:

“I am the resurrection and the life,
the one who raises the dead and gives life.
Those who put their trust in me will have life, even if they die.
Those who live trusting in me, will never succumb to death.
Do you believe this?”

Your answer was simple enough too:

“Yes, Lord.
I believe that you are the Messiah,
the Son of God;
the one whose arrival the world has been waiting for.”

But answering questions is the easy part.
Even when the answer is extraordinary
almost unimaginable even
even when the answer means
that the ordinary looking person in front of you
is nothing less than the God of the universe
the life-giver
the one who creates something out of nothing
life out of death

“Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord, I believe.”

Just a few simple words really.
Nothing to it.

“Roll back the stone.
Open the tomb.”

What?!

Open the tomb.

Don't be ridiculous.
What's in there is long dead.

Open the tomb.

Come on
it is hard enough to view the dead before burial
let alone digging up what is half decomposed
Don't make me do this

I am the resurrection and the life
Do you believe this?
Yes, Lord. I believe.
Open the tomb.

It's going to stink to high heaven in there
We'll all be sick
That stone is in place for a good reason
It is not healthy to expose yourself to what's in there
Just leave it be

I am the resurrection and the life
Do you believe this?
Yes, Lord. I believe.
Open the tomb.

Can we talk about this?
Okay, I'll admit it
It's not just the stench I'm afraid of
There's more to it than that
It's what it would mean for me
Sometimes when things are laid to rest
you've just got to let go and move on
It's not healthy to keep raking over the ashes
Sometimes you have to shut yourself off
sever the emotional ties
and stop dwelling on the past
to protect yourself against the pain
You've got to let go of the "if only"s
and accept that those hopes and dreams are gone
that the chapter is closed
that you have to get on with life as it now is
poorer perhaps, but with both feet firmly on the ground.
I've done my best to move on
I'm coping okay
Don't ask me to go back
to undo all the emotional hard yards
I'm afraid I couldn't cope

I am the resurrection and the life
Do you believe this?
Yes, Lord. I believe.
Open the tomb.

Can't we just leave it
Can't we just walk away
Can't we let the dead rest in peace
Maybe some of what's dead in there
died because I gave up too easily
Maybe it didn't need to die
Maybe if I'd looked harder
or fought longer
it wouldn't have died
Maybe if you'd been here with me
it wouldn't have died
You could have done something
You could have given me the courage
and kept me from giving up
If only you'd been here it wouldn't have died

But it doesn't matter now
It makes no difference now why it died
It's dead
Gone
Extinguished
No more for this world
Whether its death was unavoidable or not
it died
Why look on the horror of it all now?
Why dredge up the misery
the shattered dreams
the agony of lost hopes
Why?

I am the resurrection and the life
Do you believe this?
Yes, Lord. I know all that.
Open the tomb.

I can't
You don't understand
You don't realise what it would cost me to go back there
Do you know what it is like when something within you dies?
When you abandon hope?
When you give up trying to make something work
and just let it go?
Some dream
Some relationship
Some openness of heart and mind
Some passion
Some ability that others don't understand
Some flame of faith
Something that is unique to you

Something that makes you who you are
or could have made you who you could have been
Do you know what it is like to give up?
To turn off the life support?
To watch it slip away?
To steel yourself against the pain?
To bite your lip and fight the tears?
To not let it show?
To pretend you're better off without it
because that's what everyone else thought anyway?

Do you know what it costs to close that tomb
and to return to life
as though nothing had happened?
But some things have to die
They don't fit in the real world
They don't belong
They cause more pain than they are worth
They make life difficult, prickly
They have to be given up so you can fit in
and go with the flow
and get on with those around you

I am the resurrection and the life
Do you believe this?
Yes, Lord. I believe it. I've got it all down pat.
Open the tomb.

Do you have any idea what you are asking me?
To open it up again?
To make myself vulnerable again
What if it just opens up all the old wounds
and everything is just as complicated as before?
Just as unbearable?
What if it undoes all the good progress I've made?
What if I believe again
trust again
open myself up again
and just get destroyed again?
What if I just get my heart torn out
and trampled over again?
I couldn't face that
Just let it rest in peace
It can't do any harm behind that stone
It's safe
I'm safe
Don't go stirring it up again
Just let it rest in peace
I can't take the risk

If you put flesh back on those bones
and breathe life into that body
there will be nowhere for me to hide
All that unfinished business will be back on the table
Everything will be raw
and vulnerable
and terrifyingly alive with possibilities
and questions
and challenges
and passion

I am the resurrection and the life
Do you believe this?
Yes, Lord.
Open the tomb
and Yes,
I will call the dead to life
Open the tomb
and let your faith be more than words
more than theoretical answers to a question
State what you believe
and then open the tomb
engage again with the vision of what might be
and not just what is
Live again the passion of the plea:
“Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven”
Open the tomb and come to the table
where the dead who now live
can join hands with you
the living who seek refuge in death
and lead you into life
with all its terrifying uncertainties
a life where I’ll give you myself
in all my brokenness
and you give me yourself
with all your brokenness
and together we will risk life
terrifying, wonderful, passionate life.

I am the resurrection and the life
Do you believe this?
Open the tomb.