

Are you willing to put your money where your mouth is? In other words, do you believe strongly enough that you are right that you would be willing to risk something important to you if you happened to be wrong? That really is the the basis for all bets, isn't it! Before us this morning, we really have the making of the biggest gamble of our lifetime. How strongly do you believe in the resurrection? Are you willing to stake your eternal soul on it? That really is the question that we face at death. That is also the question which Jesus asked Martha when her brother Lazarus had died. **DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?** That is also the question which Jesus is asking us today. Do you believe this? 1) We confess this with our lips. 2) We are also to trust this with our hearts.

We are all aware of the fact that death is a part of our life here on this earth. The wages of sin is death. We do not expect to live on this earth forever. Yet the death of a loved one still strikes us hard. The loss that we feel in this life fills our hearts with grief and sadness. Such were the emotions of Mary and Martha in the Word of God which is before us. Their brother Lazarus had died, and by now had been in the grave for four days.

They had called for their friend Jesus to come, but Lazarus had died before Jesus arrived. Martha said to Jesus, **Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.** (21) But now that he had died, she was willing to accept that fact, even though it filled her heart with grief. Jesus held out the hope of the resurrection to her to bring her comfort in her sorrow. Then she made the beautiful statement of faith, **I know my brother will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.** (24) She truly was a believer, and allowed that confession of her faith to come out of her lips.

We also confess with our lips the faith that we have in the resurrection of all flesh on the last day. Just as Jesus rose from the grave and lives, we know that we too shall live with Him. We will be taken from our graves on that last day when He returns in all of His glory to gather us to live with Him forever in the mansions of heaven.

Certainly that faith fills our hearts with great joy. Easter is one of our favorite festivals of the church year. This year we will miss being able to gather in His house, sing again those glorious Easter hymns and "Alleluias!" We love to come to the Lord's house at Easter to boldly proclaim our belief that Jesus truly rose triumphant from the grave.

We use that faith to comfort one another with that same comfort that Martha spoke of when she said that she knew that her brother would rise again on the last day. As we go to the funerals of our loved ones, it is truly a great comfort in our grief to know that death is not the end. It is only a stage that we must pass through before we are awakened to live body and soul before the throne of Jesus forever.

Jesus' resurrection at Easter truly is a festival we desire to celebrate, for it gives us the hope of eternal life with our Savior. That is why we celebrate Easter not just once each year, but each and every week as we gather in the Lord's house to proclaim His resurrection— a little Easter celebration, even during the season of Lent.

We truly realize that without Jesus' tomb being empty that first Easter Sunday, we would not have such hope, or such joy filling our hearts. The fact that He rose physically, bodily, from the grave allows us to confess with our lips that wondrous truth that we shall also live with Him forever.

But Jesus wants more from us than just to proclaim this glorious truth with our lips. He wants that faith to have touched us so that we trust His promise with our hearts. There truly is a difference, and that difference will have a great impact upon our lives.

Martha had just confessed her faith to Jesus in stating that she believed her brother would rise again on the last day. That was a beautiful confession of faith. But Jesus did not let that confession stop there. As

soon as she made this confession with her lips, Jesus said, **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. Do you believe this?** (25-26) Why would Jesus ask this question of Martha after she had just made such a beautiful confession of her faith in the resurrection? Because there is a difference. She was confessing her faith with her lips, Jesus was asking her if she trusted that He was the One Who would be that resurrection and life. It is only through faith in Jesus that we have this certainty of eternal life.

When we attend a funeral of a loved one, we are like Martha, confessing with our lips that we believe, and that faith brings us comfort at such a time, knowing that our loved one will not remain the grave forever. But are we able to take that same faith one step further and trust that our loved one really is not dead, but lives, even as Jesus has promised? Jesus wants us to know that earthly death is not the end, but only a transition to a life with Him unencumbered with our earthly bodies. What joy would fill our hearts for our loved ones that are thus taken from this life to be with our Savior! What a difference there is in our mourning from that of one who does not have such a hope! That is what the empty tomb reassures us. Not just that we shall live again, but that Jesus has won for us a life that we have right now that will never come to any end.

Are we going to be able to cling to that same confession, and trust Jesus' promise as our life draws to a close? I have stood beside the bed of many a Christian whose life on this earth was fast coming to an end, and without doubt, without fear, almost with a longing to depart this life, they expressed that sure confidence of what their Savior had promised to them. They had heard Jesus' question put to Martha many times in their lives — Do you believe this? And at that moment in their lives when it really counted, they were able to answer, "Yes, I believe this with all my heart. Amen, Come Lord Jesus, come and take me to be with you!"

Our Savior puts that same question to us — Do you believe this? The confession comes easily off of our lips that we believe. Following that confession, our actions will tell the tale of whether those words truly come from our hearts. For when we trust what Jesus has promised to us, we will begin to live for Him even now.

Luther explained this very well in his explanation of the second article. After he stated all that Jesus did to win our salvation, he wrote, *All this He did that I should be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him.* Jesus' empty tomb means that His work for our salvation is complete. If that has truly touched our hearts as we confess with our lips, then we will begin to show Him our love by living for Him in this life, and doing those things which He asks of us in this life.

Jesus tells us that He is the resurrection and the life. He rose from the dead. That assures us that His work was complete, and that God accepted His payment for the sins of the whole world. We now have eternal life. You can bet your soul on it. We do confess with our lips that we trust our Savior for all that He has won for us. May we put that confession into practice as we show our trust in Him as we face death in this world, and in the way that we live our lives here on earth.