

**Preachers:** Audrey and Tim Hollenberg-Duffey

**Scripture:** John 11:17-27

**Tim** - I think I've told some of you this story about one Easter morning during seminary when Pastor Audrey and I were driving to the church in Ohio where we were serving about an hour away from our home in Indiana. We drove the back roads to be in time for their community Sunrise Service Easter Morning. But as we were driving, we hit a rabbit. Oh, the irony on Easter morning to hit a bunny rabbit. So, I stopped the car and got out to see if it, indeed, was dead. It appeared to be.

Seeing me pulled over, a woman stopped as well, in this friendly Ohio county, and she asked me if everything was all right. I told her yes and that I just hit a bunny on Easter morning. To which she replied, "I've got something for that." Having no idea what she could be talking about she came over with a bottle of something and sprayed it on the bunny rabbit. Then she told us to just wait a moment. We were puzzled, and then we were mighty surprised when the bunny got up, looking a little dazed, and then kind of waved at us and hopped away. Periodically, as it hopped away until it was gone from sight, it would stop and look back and wave at us. Completely shocked, we asked the lady what was in that bottle. She said, "Oh that's my hair spray; it's hair rejuvenating with a permanent wave."

April fool! Sorry, I couldn't resist telling my favorite joke on a day like today.

**Audrey** - Since 1700, Easter has fallen on April Fools' Day only 11 times. The last time Christians celebrated Easter on April Fools' Day was 1956, over 60 years ago. In the next 100 years, Easter and April Fools' Day will overlap only 3 times. It's not a very common experience; but when these two days coincide, we cannot help but draw some connections.

April Fools' Day exists possibly as a reminder of the joy we feel when we finally leave behind the darkness of winter. The prospect of spring as it begins to burst forth brings us out of our winter borrows and makes us giddy. This is usually celebrated by playing a prank on those who happened to forget what day it was. There's the apple-sized onion dipped in caramel trick, making the victim think they are biting into a nice caramel apple. There's the rubber-band-around-the-sink-sprayer trick, so that when you turn on the water, the sprayer gets you instead. There's the toothpaste-Oreo trick where you replace the creamy center with toothpaste. These are just beginner jokes, but I don't want to give you any more ideas, so I'll stop there. It is tradition that when the victim is effectively humiliated, the perpetrator yells, "April fool!"

**Tim** - Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! The one you thought was dead is alive. God says, "Gotcha world, April fool!" The tomb is empty, and God laughs with joy. The tomb is empty, and those who assumed its permanence stand dumbfounded like a fool. But to those who witnessed the life of Christ and truly heard his teachings, their mourning has turned into rejoicing. They can no longer live as though the body of Jesus were still in the tomb, cold and decaying. Christ is alive. The sun has risen on a new day, and the Son of God has risen too. April fool! "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The foolishness of the cross is this—that through the death of Christ on the cross, we have been given life. And in the raising of Christ from the dead today, we will never know the finality of death. Death has been defeated. The fullness of life in Christ cannot be contained by death. The stone sealing the tomb could not remain forever. Life and love were too strong for it. So much so, that this fullness of life can be ours in Christ. Through Jesus, we will rise again.

**Audrey** – Martha, being a good Jew, knew the teachings and prophecy of the coming Messiah. The Jewish hope for the Messiah included the resurrection of the dead when time, as they knew

it, would come to an end. So, she responds to Jesus' proclamation that her brother, Lazarus, will rise again with clarity: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." This is the promise we have been given as well. Knowing Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one coming into the world, we will rise through him again on the last day.

But new life is also available now. In response to Martha's acknowledgement that her brother will rise again in the end, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life."

**Tim** - Jesus' commentary around this "I am" statement, makes it clear that he is affording us two kinds of life. By stating that he is the resurrection, he is saying that resurrection and a future, eternal promise of life is afforded us; but he is also life, which is an invitation to live more fully now. Jesus goes on to explain that "the one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." This life that Jesus is offering is a complete and utter refusal of death. Even though you die, you live—resurrection; and living with believing means you'll never die— full life even now.

**Audrey** - To prove his point, Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, and he who was once dead is alive again. This isn't just heavenly life anymore, this is special resurrected life available for you right now. So, like Jesus says to Lazarus — come out of YOUR tombs now, today; don't wait for death; don't wait for heaven; leave behind your death and decay and be made new today. Come out of your tomb.

**Tim** - All of us have something dead in our lives. There is a force in each one of our lives that would have us hole ourselves up in our tomb. It's fear of the outside world; it's fear of people not like us; it's fear of failure; it's fear of danger; it's fear that paralyzes us. Sure, the tomb might feel safe, but it isn't real life. As Paul writes to Timothy "take hold of the life that is truly life." (1 Timothy 6:19) Come out of your tomb!

**Audrey** - We are all like baby elephants at the circus who are linked to a pole by a simple chain to keep us in place. The baby elephants learn quickly that the chain is too strong to pull away from, so even as they grow into mighty adult elephants who could easily pull away from their chains, they stay put. They are living under a myth that this is all there is to life. But it is only a myth. Come out of your tomb!

**Tim** - When JK Rowling wrote the first Harry Potter book, she was divorced, bankrupt and on welfare. After a dozen publishers rejected her manuscript, one finally agreed to publish it. But the publisher told Rowling that she needed to get a job because there's no money in children's books. We know how that turned out. Years later, she spoke to Harvard University graduates about the fear of failure. She said, "You might never fail on the scale I did, but it is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all—in which case, you fail by default."<sup>1</sup> Your fears of failing could keep you from living at all. Come out of your tomb.

**Audrey** - Lazarus lives again, fully lives again, the people can see him, hear him, smell him. John's Gospel says that this is the last straw for the religious leaders. Upon hearing news of this miracle, they begin plotting to kill Jesus. Granting life, real life—that gift was reserved for God alone, so Jesus had to die. But Lazarus' new life is a foreshadowing of what Jesus is about to do. The resurrection of Jesus will be complete, real, and whole. So real that Thomas can put his finger in the holes of Jesus' hands; so real that Peter can share a meal with him; so

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.braronson.com/famous-failures/>

real that the disciples can witness him ascend into heaven. This is real life now. Come out of your tomb—and claim your new identity in Christ.

As we've been studying all of these "I am" sayings of Jesus, we've learned that his bread will satisfy us, that his light guides us and exposes us, that his sheepfold and shepherd's eye protects us, that his vine sustains and connects us, that his way is laid out for us in the manner of his living. This is what we've seen in Jesus. This is who Jesus is—the "I am" of Jesus. But now is our opportunity. We have an "I am" statement to make, too—an "I am" statement in light of the resurrected Lord.

**Together** - I am Christ's.

**Tim** - Say that with me, I am Christ's. This is who you are. You belong to the one who satisfies you, shines on you, protects you, sustains you, guides you, and gives you life eternal and the fullness of life now. If Jesus is the great "I AM," then I am... his. I am Christ's.

Any other allegiance pales in comparison to the one who gives me true and real life, to the one who came out of his tomb and calls me out too. More than a Brethren, I am Christ's. More than a Duffey, I am Christ's. More than an American, I am Christ's. More than a citizen of this world, I am a citizen of Christ's kingdom.

Commentators say that this is the point of the entire Gospel of John. John 20:31 gives a summary of the point of the book, "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." Life in his name—that your life might be found in his name. That your "I am" might be found in his "I AM."

**Audrey** - After Jesus speaks to Martha about his identity as resurrection and life, he asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" Martha replies in John 11:27, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." Martha, in the face of her brother's death, chooses to believe in the resurrection and life of Jesus. She chooses to deny the power that death had over her and her loved one, and she gives all the power over to the great I AM. She finds her "I am" in his "I AM."

**Tim** - And so should you also on this Easter morning. Smile and rejoice in the great joke that Jesus has played on the world. He is not dead. He is resurrection and life. You too, like Lazarus, can find life in him if you but come out of your tomb. Because you are Christ's, then your "I am" may be found in the "I AM." And all who claim "I am Christ's" say, Amen.

**Audrey** - This morning, we would like to give you an opportunity to claim this identity in the risen Lord, to claim your "I am" in the great "I AM", in a very tangible way. We have name tags that we invite you to wear today that say "Hello my name is... I AM CHRIST'S"! The ushers will pass them out during our closing hymn. Wear them proudly and with boldness, for you have found life now and everlasting in the name of Christ. And as you wear this new name, may you be a witness to all you meet about the abundant life found in Jesus. Let's stand and sing.