Hi,

Today’s updates:

* This Sunday in my 11am class we will be continuing the series, *Living Hope*, for I know we could all use some more hope in these very difficult times. I hope you will join us [on my Facebook page for ministry](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* Don’t forget to [vote for your favorite hymn here](https://www.jotform.com/202296152204042?fbclid=IwAR3PCQD_EW-ScuozGaeQjsT5lUgiu0OGCOfSIa1Sln7cYupvzgqvqOxhsXU).

In this series on Jesus’ “I am” statements, we come to Easter in September, for Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

***John 11:17-27 (NRSV)***

**When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”**

***John 20:11-18 (NRSV)***

**But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.**

So we come to the seventh and last of Jesus’ “I am . . .” statements and certainly the most remarkable. In her commentary, Gail O’Day calls John 11:25-26, “the most far-reaching promise anywhere in the Gospel of what relationship with Jesus offers those who embrace it. They are a piece with the promises of living water (4:10, 14; 7:37-38), living bread (6:33, 35, 51), and even eternal life (3:15; 6:47; 10:28), but they supersede all those earlier promises by confronting head on the question of death.”

*The death and resuscitation of Lazarus*

Jesus and his disciples have gone to the eastern side of the Jordan River, to an area known as Batanea (John 10:40-42). It is about four days from the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, in Bethany, a town very near Jerusalem. There, Jesus learns that his friend Lazarus has fallen ill. A couple of days later, Jesus learns, by seemingly supernatural insight, that Lazarus has died. So Jesus, with his disciples, sets out for the four-day journey to Lazarus’ home.

When they arrive, Jesus is met by Martha, who expresses her regret that Jesus had not been there when her brother had died, for she believes that Jesus would have cured him and, even now, she places hope in Jesus and the unique relationship he has with the Father.

When Jesus says to her, “Your brother will rise again,” Martha naturally assumes that Jesus is speaking of the great resurrection of the dead that will happen when the Day of the Lord arrives. But now, Jesus takes her to a place she never would have suspected, saying to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (v. 25-26).

In this statement, Jesus is making two complementary points; i.e., he isn’t using “resurrection” and “life” as synonyms for emphasis. Gail O’Day helps us to see this “hinge point,” as she calls it. “Resurrection” and “life” refer to the two phrases that immediately follow in 25b and 26a:

the one who believes in me and dies → yet lives

the one who lives and believes in me → never dies

*Kept promises*

Jesus is the resurrection, the embodiment of the promise that though we will die, we will yet live, that our death is not our end. This is the promise that one day we will be resurrected just as Jesus was resurrected. We affirm this promise every time we recite the Apostles’ Creed, asserting our belief in “the resurrection of the body.”

The promise of resurrection speaks to the life that will be ours, but when Jesus also says, “I am . . . the life,” he speaks to our life with God now. As hard as it may be to grasp and truly believe, God’s victory over sin and death is already ours. As Jesus puts it, the one who lives and believes in him never dies. In the glories of God’s great and wonderful mysteries, the defeat of death is not merely a promise, it is a present reality.

And so Jesus does bring Lazarus back to life, calling him out of his tomb. It is an act of compassion, another sign to the truth about Jesus, and a foreshadowing of what lies just days ahead for Jesus. Very soon, Jesus himself will be met by death as he hangs on a Roman cross.

*Easter resurrection*

Mary Magdalene has made her way to Jesus’ tomb early on Sunday morning. Very early. It is still dark. She is going to help finish preparing Jesus’ body for the year or so it will lie in the tomb, as there hadn’t been time to finish the burial preparations before sundown on Friday.

But when Mary arrives, she finds that the large, heavy, round stone blocking the doorway into the tomb has been rolled away. Something is terribly wrong and, without even looking in the tomb, she races to find Peter and another disciple. After running back to the tomb, the disciples discover that the tomb is empty. And empty in a weird way. The burial cloths that had been used to wrap Jesus’ body are still lying on the stone slab. But they aren’t piled haphazardly, as if tossed aside when the body was removed. Instead, they look like they had been wrapped around a balloon that had been deflated.

After the other disciples head home, surely perplexed and fearful, Mary stays behind and sits in the garden. She weeps, knowing only that Jesus’ body is missing. Yet, she is soon thrust into the post-Easter world. Jesus is no longer dead, he is standing right in front of her in the garden. Mary had even mistaken him for the gardener. She starts to embrace Jesus, but things are not as they had been before. Jesus will not stay with her and the other disciples, he must yet return to the Father. So Mary rushes to tell the other disciples that Jesus’ body was not stolen. God had resurrected Jesus. He lives!

Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, has now been resurrected himself. As Paul would put it a couple of decades later, Jesus is “the first fruits of those who have died . . . thanks be to God, who give us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:20, 57). Everything has changed; nothing is the same.

We live in a post-Easter world, a world that has been, is being, and shall be remade by God. We are called to faith, to place our trust in God as revealed fully in Jesus Christ – and nowhere else. In each of the seven “I am . . .” statements, John has led us deeper and deeper into the truth that is Jesus Christ. He is “the way, the truth, and the life . . . the resurrection and the life.” We are invited to experience the love that defeats death, the power that sustains eternal life. Our acceptance of this invitation is our assent to the truth of Jesus’ claims and our trust in him; i.e., our faith in Jesus Christ.

Such faith is nurtured by the church. It is here, among diverse people who are all on their own journey that we learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus. But we can’t expect to discover God’s gifts if our post-Easter plans include only an occasional encounter with the people of God. It is like imagining we can learn to play the piano with a couple of lessons each year. The world clamors for our attention. It demands our priorities. Thus, we must make a conscious and deliberate decision to ground our life in God and live it among disciples of Jesus Christ. Each day offers us a new Easter, a new opportunity to embrace life with a passion that can only be found in the truth, the love, and the life of our Lord.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott