

Our kids can transition back to be with our fabulous Transformation Station team. We love to hear families say, "I came back because my kids loved it," so even if the sermon stinks - you'll probably be back anyway! :)

"The End of Your Story"
John 11:1-44

Very excited you have chosen to come and worship with us on this Easter Sunday. My name is Tanner Turley. I serve as the Lead Pastor of Redemption Hill. I want to thank you for joining us. I hope to catch many of you who are new with us on your way out for a little Easter handshake, hug, hi-five, shoulder bump, however you want it. :)

We are very grateful for the amazing work of God in our church over the past five years. Two weeks from today, we will celebrate our 5th Anniversary on April 10th with a great service and then host a Jazz Brunch afterward at 11:30. So make plans to join us!

Introduction: Pg. ___ John 11:1

Let me tell you a little bit about myself (**FAMILY PIC**): Again. my name is Tanner Turley. I have a wonderful wife, named Marsha, and three beautiful daughters: Parker 7, Kesed almost 5, and Jordyn, almost 2. (They get their beauty from their mother, hey, not funny!, but hopefully their jump shot, from me!)

I absolutely love being a dad. One of the highlights of our family these days is helping our oldest daughter, Parker, become a more proficient reader. That means we're reading a lot of books. We got Fancy Nancy books, Elephant & Piggie books, BoxCar Children books, & Magic Treehouse books, which is backfiring on me big-time because Parker now wants me to build her a treehouse, which is really awesome except for the fact that is basically like asking me to build a skyscraper, but don't tell her that. It's a horrible thing to crush a 7 year old's dreams. Wood, hammer, nails. How hard can it be? :)

It has been a really cool experience watching Parker's vocabulary grow and her reading pace accelerate. She has now graduated to "chapter books" (you know, books with chapters), and one of the temptations for Parker is to want to peek ahead to the last few pages to see how the story is going to end.

Isn't that a temptation for us all?

How will the story end? How will the story end of that book, of that movie, Of that life!

How will the story end....? How will *YOUR* story end....?

TITLE SLIDE

What will the end of your story look like? What will it reveal? How will people remember you?

I understand most of us don't ask this question very often, BUT we should consider the end of our story not only brings the pages being written today into greater focus, but it also moves us to consider what lies beyond the end of our story.

T: Today, I want to introduce you to a man whose story came to end. His name was Lazarus.

I'm not going to take the time to read all of this story, but I will call your attention to particular sections as we move through the story. So let's start with *verses 1-4*... But then in *verse 14*, we see Jesus says.

This story is all about what happens when you invite Jesus into your story... Let me give you four encouragements this am.

I. When you invite Jesus into your story, Hope arrives.

This story immediately startles us by reminding us that...

Suffering is real!

- One thing I appreciate about following Jesus is that Christianity does not minimize suffering, but tells us God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, entered our suffering and actually suffered to accomplish our salvation.
- Suffering is real, and suffering riddles us - physically and emotionally.
 - Martha & Mary are undone. Death has a way of unraveling us. It brings a certain sense of finality. Our lives will never be the same without the person we lost.
 - That's why we see Mary falling at the feet of Jesus, distraught, weeping over their loss.
 - BUT how does Jesus respond?
 - Verse 33: "When Jesus saw [Mary and the others] weeping...he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled."
 - The greek word for "greatly troubled" can mean that "he shook with emotion and rage." Jesus was furious at the effects of sin and suffering.
 - And it moved him to tears. Verse 35 simply says: "Jesus wept."
- Sorrow & Anger are two appropriate responses to the suffering around us.
- The heinous attacks in Brussels on Tuesday should cause us to rage against wickedness and weep.

Suffering is real, and suffering must be dealt with.

- I don't know about you, but I want a God *and* I want to be a part of a story where suffering suffers the death blow.
 - That is why the sisters called for Jesus. He *is* the game changer. They knew Jesus could heal Lazarus. On separate occasions they both say: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
 - But they did not know the extent of his power... to turn our suffering upside-down.
- In verse 23, Jesus says: "Your brother will rise." And Martha thinks he is referring to a time in the distant future...
- But then Jesus, with seven of the most powerful words the world has ever heard, says: "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" (John 11:25)
- Did you catch that? Jesus is not simply able to provide life beyond death. HE IS the resurrection and HE IS life. They are wrapped up in him.
- This is a staggering claim. Only God says stuff like this...
- So let me go ahead and put this on the table: if you want real, abundant, satisfying life AND life beyond death through Resurrection, Jesus says, "Come on over. I've Got that for you." That's what's up!

When you invite Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, into your story, hope arrives, and when hope arrives...

II. When you invite Jesus into your story, the end is really the beginning.

Jesus does not weep for long. He is so furious at death that he moves to reverse it. *Read 38-39*

- This is an absolutely hopeless situation... we're talking four days! The wake was over! Graveside Service, over! Dello Russo Funeral Service has already been paid.
- But Jesus answers in *verse 40(-44)*.

The Lazarus story screams to us that God made us to experience LIFE, forever.

- Christianity makes the stunning claim that *death was never supposed to be in the picture; it was not part of God's original design in the beginning, and death will not be present in the end.*
- Doesn't this resonate with you? Deep down: none of us want the story to end.
- We cry when people die, not simply because we love people, but because death is an unwelcomed intruder in God's story.
- God gave us Life to be enjoyed in perfect harmony: Every relationship dominated by love. Every person looked forward to going to work every day. Every day was sunny. Every season ended in a duck boat parade. Nobody sick. Nobody sad. Everybody glad. (I promise I'm not gonna rap)... Life was perfect.

BUT God's harmonious world was disrupted because we doubted his provision and rejected his plan.

- Death was our decision. The Bible has a word for that rejection, and that word is "sin."
- Sin is something we all do with professional skill. We reflexively put ourselves before others and want what others have. We don't have to work hard to produce lust, greed and pride in our hearts. We say stuff sane people just absolutely should not say. We look down on others. Judge them. We hide. We want people to think we are someone else, because of our insecurities.
- We have wronged others. And we have wronged God. Thousands of times

BUT Jesus died for that.

Here's the irony:

- We can experience Life because Jesus experienced death.
- Death comes as a result of sin, but Jesus took our sin and guilt and instead of handing it back, he gave us the gift of righteousness (a perfect record before God), grace and forgiveness.
- Why did Jesus die? **1 Peter 3:18 tells us: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God"**
- Death meets its death in the death and resurrection of Jesus

Have you invited Jesus into your story so that the end of your story will be the beginning of life forever in God's presence?

T: Not only does it never end...

III. When you invite Jesus into your story, the story gets better and better

Isn't this what we want? "Yo... I hope my story takes a turn for the worse. It's way too good right now. No one is saying *that!*"

But if we're being honest, there are many moments in our story, whether it's circumstantial or due to our own stupidity, we would love to tap the delete button, or maybe just "select all" (you know what I'm saying?) and erase that whole chapter.

Deep down we all want the story to get better. Through Jesus it will. He is the Divine Editor. How? Follow me.

First, The story gets better as we see the glory of Jesus.

- This story is less about Lazarus rising from the dead and more about Jesus showing that is the Resurrection. Got that? Verse 40: “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the Glory of God?”
- But what is glory?
- The Glory of Jesus is his worth and perfection on display for us to see. He is in a class by himself.
- Glory lights things up! Glory captivates us! There is nothing dull here, nothing monotonous, or monotone, everything bright, everything dynamic and robust. If we walk away today, not amazed by Jesus, something didn’t translate...
- And the more we see his glory, the more we discover that there is always more to see.

[PIC] C.S. Lewis, in his children’s book, Prince Caspian (it’s a chapter book, mind you) depicts this when the youngest character in the story, Lucy, is reunited with Aslan after not seeing him for hundreds of years. SHE RUNS to him and buries her face in his mane, crying tears of joy because she is so excited to see him. Then she says, “Aslan, you are bigger.” And he answers: “That is because you are older, little one... Every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

Do you see the irony of the upside-down kingdom of Christ. As children grow, everything around grows smaller, BUT as we grow in Christ and experience more of Jesus, he grows bigger and bigger! Are you discovering this? Jesus gets better & better!

- Jesus is glorious and every glorious thing Jesus does is motivated by LOVE (Verse 3, 5, 36).

But don’t miss this next part: the story gets better because every glorious thing he does pictures forth the glory that lies ahead.

- Lazarus was a billboard. I was dead. Hello! Now, I’m undead. And that’s not just cool. That’s how it’s going to be forever.
- **“The message of Easter is that God’s new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you’re now invited to belong to it.” - N.T. Wright**
- Death no more. Sickness no more. Disharmony no more. Hungry kids no more.
- We get in on that, NOW! Every good thing we do pictures forth the coming kingdom of God. That’s why I’m really excited about our FOR THE CITY series beginning next week, as we explore how we can be a force for good at work, in the city, as we serve and in our neighborhoods.
- Easter is the story of the new story God is writing in our world.

T: But don’t miss this...

IV. When you invite Jesus into your story, faith is required.

- Jesus asks us the same question he asked Martha in this story: **“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?*”**

Faith says: “I can’t...”

- This was obvious for Martha & Mary. It’s not always obvious to us...
- We think we can rewrite our own story. We don’t want anyone’s help, even God.
- If we’re going to have the life we want now and eternal life forever, we think we can make it happen on our own.

- Michael Bloomberg (Medford Native and Former Mayor of NYC with a net worth of \$43B) said: **“I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I’m not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It’s not even close.”** Wow.
- But Jesus says: “The never dying kind of life comes through trusting in, not what you can do, but what I’ve done.”
- **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)**

Faith says: “I can’t, but he can.”

- We look at who Christ is and what he has done and says: “He is enough. He’s done it all.” I want the gift he offers.
- I don’t want Jesus to be an addition to my life. He is the centerpiece.

Conclusion:

Let me leave you with this thought today: We’ve been talking about inviting Jesus into our story. But here’s the shocked discovery: God is the one who is *inviting us* into his story. He has opened his arms to us! So my plea with you today is this:

Let Jesus change your story by receiving the gift of life he provides.

Some of you may be saying: “I’m not sure if all of this is real, but I want to hear more”

- If that’s you, would you fill out the connect card - I want to EXPLORE more...

Others are saying: “This is not too good to be true; It’s sooo good, that it has to be true. I’m all in.” I want to receive the gift of life Jesus is offering me today.

- If that’s you, would you take that card and let us know - I COMMIT... we want to help you move forward!

Jesus is alive. Because he lives, we live. Life is for the Living! The best is yet to come!