

John 11.1-45

PRAYER

Father may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us into the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord - Amen

SERMON

One of the longest readings we have had in church this morning is the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus and ironically, it contains the shortest verse in the bible in some translations it says simply Jesus Wept and he wept at the loss of his friend Lazarus. Our gospel reading tells the story of Lazarus and of a family's bereavement.

At some time in our lives we will all suffer loss and bereavement. I lost my biological parents when I was in my twenties. I am eternally grateful for the blessing of a second family of my best friends at school who sort of absorbed me into their family. Sadly my second mum Pat passed away two years ago. Of course as a vicar I meet and support bereaved families as part of funeral ministry. Sometimes people are angry that their loved one is gone, sometimes it is an unutterable grief and sadness. It is different for each person but always pain can be visceral and agonising.

So, perhaps we can sympathise with the sorrow and pain of those sisters and friends of Lazarus. Clearly Jesus was bereft at the loss of a dear friend in Lazarus, but he delayed two days before setting out to visit the family upon hearing the news of Lazarus' illness which given his obvious love of this family must have seemed odd to the disciples. Hindsight being a wonderful thing we know it is because Jesus' miracle had to be perceived as such that the man was truly dead before being brought back to life.

Eventually Jesus goes to Bethany and is met by Martha whose faith firmly believes that if Jesus had arrived sooner her brother would not have died. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Jews believe that the soul stays near the body for three days, but on the fourth day departs. The only hope for Lazarus after four days is divine power. The Jews and indeed Martha, believed that people would be resurrected on the last day of judgement but no one in their right mind would believe a body being dead for four days could be bodily actually resurrected.

John's gospel in particular is concerned about revealing who and what Jesus is. There are 7 'I am' sayings in this gospel which reveal Jesus' nature and purpose e.g. I am the good shepherd, I am the bread of life and in our gospel passage this morning he says the fifth 'I AM' saying '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. Jesus was claiming to be the source of both. There is no resurrection apart from Christ, and there is no eternal life apart from Christ. Beyond that, Jesus was also making a statement concerning His divine nature. He does more than give life; He *is* life, and therefore death has no ultimate power over Him. Jesus confers this spiritual life on those who believe in Him, so that they share His triumph over death.

The second sister Mary arrives and says pretty much the same as Martha – if you had been here my brother would not have died. Jesus is greatly upset and weeps as he is taken to the place where Lazarus was buried. I always take great comfort and great courage from this. We know that Jesus is fully God but he is also fully human, he knows what it is like to be us, to be angry to laugh to be bereaved and heartbroken, he understands us he knows us, he loves us because of our failings and human nature Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, good **PTO**

practical sensible Martha makes a good practical sensible point 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' The stone is rolled away and Lazarus walks out alive. You can just imagine the astonishment, the joy, the disbelief. Surrounded by so many people from Jerusalem who had come to comfort Mary and Martha and his own followers saw what Jesus had done and believed in him.

When people lose loved ones through illness, accident or these uncertain and scary times war conflict and terrorism, the grief can be overwhelming. Nothing truly prepares us for the death of someone we love very much. No matter what has gone before we never truly believe that we will have to step through this world without them We never "get over our loss", we just learn to live with it. We cherish our loved ones deep within our hearts and we learn to live again.

But the promise Jesus made to Mary and Matha over 2000 years ago is as true today as it was then and as hard as it may be today and every day, we face without the people we love, they are not lost to us and we can take comfort that they have eternal life through Jesus Christ and we will see them again. I know I will see my mum and dad and Pat again. I know I have eternal life through Christ

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 Jesus promised us all this day and always

AMEN