
Sunday 29th March 2020.

Readings: Romans 8:6-11 and John 11:1-45

John 11:1-45

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.”

Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Reflection

“Lord, the one whom you love is sick!” Martha and Mary had tried their local medicinal herbs; but Lazarus needed more. The sisters had seen Jesus heal all sorts of maladies. They knew he could help. “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus... so when he heard Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days!” In the very same sentence where John reminds us that Jesus loved his three friends, Jesus seems to be ignoring them!

It’s a verse to remember, when we too grapple with the mystery of unanswered prayer, or with delayed answers to prayer. We need to be reminded that God still loves us; even when, and I would say, especially when, we cannot see what God is doing! What did Jesus do during those two days? Almost certainly he prayed; asking Father God what he should do, as well as praying for his friends at their time of need. How else would Jesus have known Lazarus had died? Except Father God had told him?

Jesus could have gone to Bethany and healed Lazarus immediately. Instead, Jesus waited, because God wanted to do something far bigger. Something that would reveal his glory, but which would put Jesus in immediate danger; a catalyst that would trigger the events of Good Friday. Sometimes God asks us to wait, because either our request, or the timing, isn’t right. Waiting can test our faith, or it can strengthen it. Sometimes both at the same time!

I love that Martha questions Jesus, but also affirms her trust in him; “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died! But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask!” What an extraordinary demonstration of faith! I don’t think for one moment Martha expected Jesus to restore Lazarus. Resurrection would only happen on the last day. Moreover, Lazarus’ body had been entombed for four days! It would have begun to decay...

But their conversation reveals the depth and maturity of Martha’s faith. She called Jesus Lord, Messiah, Son of God, Saviour. She proclaims that Jesus can save life; now she was about to witness it. Mary had also joined the crowd at the tomb. She too challenged Jesus; “Lord, if you had been here...” Her tears, together with the grief of the crowd, drew forth an agonising response from Jesus. God is not distant from our pain. He experiences it with us. He is moved by our loss.

Our love, at its best, is still imperfect; but God loves our loved ones with his perfect love; he loves them even more than we do! So Jesus wept; and God weeps. God weeps at the pain and the horror of death. We can be sure that God is weeping right now over the ravages of coronavirus; weeping with those who suffer; weeping with the bereaved.

When Jesus told the Jews to roll back the stone Martha was horrified; “By this time there is a bad odour!” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me! Lazarus, come out!” It’s not a request; it’s a command! To everyone’s

astonishment, Lazarus shuffled out into the light, still bound in his grave clothes. I wonder what he was thinking! The passage ends on a high note, with many of the Jews coming to believe in Jesus. But there were just as many who began to plot Jesus' downfall.

We cannot sit on the fence. Either we believe in Jesus, or we do not. Either we trust him, or we do not. "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Never was a question more crucial than during this current crisis.

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