

John 11 – The Raising of Lazarus

When I put together the series of midweek reflections on the signs of Christ's glory from John's gospel way back at the start of the year it didn't really occur to me that this one –the raising of Lazarus – would be in the week of Ash Wednesday. And after discovering the clash I have been wondering about what should be done. Somehow the reading didn't seem quite appropriate for the occasion – should we delay this last sign till later? Should I do a short reflection for today on some other more suitable passage and then talk about this last sign tomorrow?

Finally I decided that the right thing to do would be to carry on and use this reading today. And the reason for doing so is largely down to one verse in the story. It's that verse often touted as the shortest verse in the bible – *Jesus wept*. Or as it's translated in the NRSV which we had tonight. *Jesus began to weep*.

It's a verse that shows the true depth of the humanity of Jesus. It's a verse that shows the true depth of his divinity. It's a verse that demonstrates the depth of his love for us and for the world. He is sharing the grief of Mary and Martha and the friends of Lazarus. He shares our grief and our sorrow. He shares the grief and pain of the world. God incarnated as a human being - the Word made flesh – weeps with us and for us.

We can picture God today looking down at our world and weeping. Weeping with those who are suffering from Covid, those separated from loved ones who are ill or dying, those whose family or friends have died. Weeping with those who are hungry, or homeless. Weeping with those who are abused or persecuted. Weeping with those who are marginalised or forgotten.

Weeping at the all the suffering and pain in the world. Weeping at the sin that causes so much of it. Weeping that things are so far short from the perfect world he created.

And so I reached the conclusion that this story of the raising of Lazarus, far from being the wrong story for the start of Lent, is actually an ideal one. It begins with tears. It continues as we shall see with the mourners leading Jesus to the tomb - the place of deepest sorrow. And it finishes with the joy of life from death as Jesus calls Lazarus to come out of the tomb. It ends with a message of hope and transformation. It embraces – as you will recall – that wonderful statement from Jesus – I am the resurrection and the life.

It mirrors the story of Holy Week for which Lent is a preparation. The sorrow and sadness of Jesus' death on the cross. His body being laid in the tomb. The tears of his followers. And then the joy and excitement as he is raised from the dead on the third day. Bringing hope and transformation to the world. I am the resurrection and the life.

And it mirrors too our story. We reflect today on our sin and wrongdoing. On all the things that separate us from God and those around us. On our part in the sin of the world. We recall our mortality – *I am but dust and to dust I will return*. Through the tears we come, if you like, to the tomb. To our place of sorrow. But we are confident of the forgiveness and

new life offered through Jesus's death upon the cross and his resurrection. We know that the sorrow and the tears and the pain and the regrets are not the end point. We know that Jesus will call us out of the tomb to a new life, a new beginning and a new hope. He is the resurrection and the life.

And this extends too to the story of the world. A world in which as we know so well there is much pain and abuse and suffering. A world where there are tears of sadness and despair. A world where it seems hope has melted away. But a world that through the death and resurrection of Jesus is offered reconciliation to God – the opportunity to be in true harmony with God - and a hope for a future. He is the resurrection and the life.

In the story of Lazarus what Mary and Martha and the others could see was not the whole picture. In the story of our lives what we can see now is not the whole picture. In the story of the world what is portrayed all around us is not the whole picture. There is hope. There is a future. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus there is life in all its fullness. He is the resurrection and the life.