

## Reflection on John 11; 1 - 45

Jesus wept! – a short phrase, a telling phrase. Jesus wept!

This week we find ourselves reading through the lengthy story of Lazarus. Lazarus, although not one of the twelve disciples, was a close friend and follower of Jesus. When Lazarus takes ill, Mary and Martha send for Jesus, and his disciples urge him to go to him rather than going back into Judea where the people are hostile. But Jesus persists and goes to Judea and by the time he gets to Bethany, Lazarus is already dead and buried. Mary and Martha are disappointed and despairing 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'

And the people saw that Jesus wept with them, because he loved Lazarus. Now his friend was dead and Jesus wept. Why did he weep? For the loss, the sheer aching loss of his friend; from anger – the anger that afflicts us all when death seems to have won; from regret – Martha, Mary and their friends all believed that if he had been there he could have prevented the death – was it from regret, because he could have done things differently? We don't know why Jesus wept when Lazarus died but possibly for any or all of these reasons, for these are the emotions death brings to us. Loss - dragging, aching, desperate loss; anger – anger at death, anger at the deceased themselves for leaving us; regret - because no matter what we do – there are always things we could have done differently. Jesus wept – for that is indeed how we humans respond to loss, to death.

I suppose that it is precisely because death is so real and so painful, that we often try to deny it. From the time of the Greeks, it has been suggested that only the body dies, that the human soul is somehow immortal. If human beings are really immortal underneath the skin, then death is not so important, not so painful. Sometimes that message has been imagined from the writings of St Paul. But, although Paul does make a clear distinction in his writing between flesh and spirit –if we look at St Paul's writing more closely, his distinction is not between the flesh of earthly life and the spirit of eternal life. His distinction is between life before and after finding Christ and hearing his good news. The life of the flesh, is for Paul, the life people lead, before they become Christian. When they become Christian they die to that old life of the flesh and become spiritual beings. For Paul, it certainly is not a belief in the immortality of the soul. Paul was a Jewish rabbi and the Jews, like Christians believe in one whole person – body, mind, soul, heart are all one whole. Jesus found death real! Jesus found death painful! He wept for Lazarus. He asked for the cup of his own death to be taken away.

It is in this context – of death being both real and painful that Jesus declares: 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone believing in me, even if they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die' (11:25-26). The point of the saying, and ultimately of the story as a whole, is not to pretend that Christians don't die, but it is to make and celebrate the claim that people who believe in Jesus find life – and the life they find is eternal life. It is sharing the life of God both here and now - and forever. A sharing in God's eternal life that is true during our earthly lives, it is true through death and it is true beyond our dying.

Our story today is quite an intimate one, it is about a death within a little community, Lazarus friends and family are the main players. It shows us very clearly the despair and desperation we feel in the face of death. But this little community found, in their despair, that Jesus was the Resurrection and the Life and they shared that promise not just within their own community but beyond it.

If we proclaim Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life, then we tell people something about God. We tell them that this is the God who loves the world so much that he sent his own Son. It is to say that God cared enough for us, for each one of us to need to share with us in the experience of death. God loves us enough, that through Jesus, he has deliberately and knowingly, experienced death for himself. To proclaim Jesus as the resurrection and life, is to say something more still. It is to say that God loves us enough, not just to share our experience with us – but to share his experience with us. God promises us, eternal life. This is not life instead of death but life which is beyond death – the life of God.

Our God takes us through death to resurrection. Resurrection does not avoid death, does not evade it or pretend that it doesn't happen or that it isn't painful. But we are pointed to look at death through God's promise of eternal life. We live through all the despair, the anger, the loss, the regrets of death and see the rainbow of promise beyond.

Jesus said 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies.'