

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 29 March 2020, 5th Sunday of Lent

Collect (*the Church's prayer for today*):

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

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

This weeks reflection is by Pete Gillions

I thought that I got to know George fairly well over the three years he was studying here. But it was on our recent visit to Tanzania seeing George amongst his own people, that opened my eyes to the man he really is. There I saw for myself his deep connection with and concern for the people that he lived amongst.

The account of Jesus meeting with Mary and Martha after their brother Lazarus had died gives us a similar insight.

It is a very intimate picture. It shows us that Jesus was not a remote and distant figure but someone with a deep care and concern for those he lived amongst. This account of the death of a loved one is both familiar and strange. Familiar, in the reaction of Mary and Martha as we see their request for help apparently unanswered, and their consequent loss and heartbreak. Familiar, in the inevitable 'if only' question that it raised – if God had only heard their prayer this would not have happened. Something that I am sure all of us have felt from time to time. The question of where God is in the midst of tragedy is never ignored in the scriptures.

³³ *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was **deeply moved in spirit and troubled**.* ³⁴ *"Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.* ³⁵ **Jesus wept.**

³⁶ Then the Jews said, **“See how he loved him!”**

This is a very poignant picture that reminds us that what happens in the lives of each and every one of us matters to him. It tells us that the Jesus we believe in is not remote and far off but cares deeply. This is the fundamental of our faith. God cares for all he has made, and that includes us and those we love. We are not alone in the face of tragedy.

And I believe that those simple two words ‘*Jesus wept*’ speak of something more than emotion. They show Jesus felt not only grief for the loss of his friend Lazarus but also a deep rooted grief that death had entered the world. Fundamental to our understanding of faith is that we were created for life not death, that death is an intrusion, things were not meant to be this way.

But we cannot deny that this can sound as strange to many today as it did to Martha when Jesus talks to her of the ‘resurrection and the life’. He says that those who believe in him will live, even though they die. Here he is telling us something of why he came to earth, to break the curse of death. Jesus sees death for what it is, in all its appalling effect and says he has come to bring life. It tells us something of the divine purpose of his life. And he leaves her - and us - with the question ‘Do you believe this?’

As we see the turmoil that the Coronavirus has caused we are reminded of the fragility of life. But in the resurrection of Jesus we see death is swallowed up, that our tears fall into a ground pregnant with hope. May God help us to believe that one day all creation will “Rest in peace and rise in glory”.

Amen.



S⊕ JAMES WOODSIDE
HORSFORTH



FAITH HOPE LOVE
Sharing God's blessing in Horsforth