

Grief and Resurrection – John 11:1-45.

We find ourselves on the 5th Sunday of Lent, 2020, in a very different place than many of us expected to be. It feels like we are waist deep in chaotic waters, fear and uncertainty all around us, the prospect of having to 'do life' in a very different way for the foreseeable future is upon us. So, it is perhaps, serendipitous that we are confronted this morning with a Bible reading which is about loss and hope. A passage which enables us to reflect on the nature of God when things do not go to plan and difficulties over take us.

The story begins with telling us how much Jesus loves this family. So, how does Jesus take care of the people he loves; rush straight over when he hears of how ill Lazarus is? No! he waits for two days! This is tough reading, "This illness is not for death, but for the glory of God." What does that even mean?

Some of us are more comfortable with this than others, God's purposes and timing, are not our own. But I know, there have been situations when I've just wanted God to turn up and do something. When I've been in pain and I've wanted God right now! When the questions of "Why" and "Where are you, Lord", have been on my lips. In many ways, although these were difficult times, looking back, there was always a sense of the reality of God's presence with me, even when I struggled to find answers to my questions – God was faithful, and it is His faithfulness that shines through this story.

When Jesus does eventually arrive both sisters approach him with the same plea, "if only you had been here." Both come differently but both come, both come in pain and despair at the loss of their brother. I wonder if both come disappointed and angry that Jesus had not come earlier! (wonderfully this is allowed!)

"I THOUGHT HE WAS SUPPOSED TO LOVE US?"

Throughout the Bible God is described as being saddened, grieved, moved to pity by the plight of his people and Jesus, God incarnate, displays that heart.

John, simply writes: "Jesus wept." This stands as a beautiful reminder of a God who feels our deepest pain and weeps at our brokenness but this is not the end of the story.

Yet, still Jesus had delayed – the hard questions are still being asked, "Couldn't this man who heals blind people have stopped him from dying?" Jesus does not answer and there are times when we do not get an answer to our questions.

It is at this point we are brought to an explosive, brilliant conclusion, that the God who seemed to arrive too late, the God who hears our cries and weeps with us, is not only a friend with an ear to listen but is also Lord over life and death.

Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb and he does! It is enough to say that neither Mary nor Martha expected this – they understood that resurrection was supposed to happen at the end of time but here in their midst stood Jesus "The resurrection and the life." Resurrection is here and now – this means that all of the ways we experience pain and death in this life have the

possibility of a surprise ending. Whether it is a broken relationship, a city marred by tragedy, an unexpected diagnosis or a pandemic sweeping the world. When so many of our realities appear predetermined, in Christ we do not need to fear, for God is faithful.

Jesus stands to remind us what God is like in our darkest times. So often, we employ the words of absence and distance as we go through difficulties but as we read the truth of God's word, hear the testimony of those who have gone before us and know the reality of the Holy Spirit in our lives, God will surprise us, usually not within our expectations, with new life, new beginnings and remarkable endings flowing from the throne room of heaven.

May we be encouraged to always turn to God, the God of all life, peace and hope, in the face of fear and panic, of uncertainty and loss, of change and challenge.

May Gods peace be with you all.