

I am the Resurrection and the Life

The story of the raising of Lazarus is a strange and unsettling story, full of real fear and raw human emotion as well as symbolism and miracle. Jesus receives a desperate message to come and help from close friends yet he does not come until it is all apparently too late. No-one understands what He is about until the moment of the miracle itself.

Martha comes closest, but only when she abandons everything she thinks she knows-her theology and understanding of God-and clings to the only one she *does* know-Jesus himself who says: 'I am the resurrection and the life'. Note that she does this before Jesus raises Lazarus-her faith is operating without evidence or confirmation of Jesus's claim at that point.

Why does Jesus delay? Contemporary Jewish belief held that final death when the soul left the body only happened after four days-so the story is carefully constructed to show that Lazarus was fully dead and therefore there could be no doubting that his raising was truly a raising from the dead. Jesus delayed because he was praying before he went. When he arrived at Bethany, He had His answer to prayer because he already knew that Lazarus' body hadn't decayed-the miracle was already taking place in the grave and Lazarus was ready to be raised.

This passage from John contains one of the most well-known verses in the Bible: 'Jesus wept'. It is also set in the context of two other descriptions of deep and public emotion from Jesus. Verse 33 tells us that he was 'disturbed in spirit' when he encountered the weeping mourners. In fact, the original Greek is more directly translated as a 'snort of anger or indignation'. Commentators have puzzled over this and many have felt that Jesus's anger and indignation is at death itself, the cruelty and vileness of it. I think he reacted this way on both a human level and as the Author of Life come face to face with death, the enemy. Let us never sanitise death or gloss over it in the name of Christianity. Death is terrible-our joy is that Christ has conquered it, not that death is nothing.

Our current unprecedented world situation sees death on the ascendant and fear in all our lives. Yet we have a God who has known exactly that fear, in exactly the way we know it. We have a God who has suffered our diseases, our grief and our pain. We have a God who saves us through being faithful to us; we do not have to rely on our weak faith. Like Martha we can come to that place where we admit that nothing we have is adequate to cope or understand and in prayer we can come to Jesus and say 'I believe you are the Messiah'.

Our situation is made so much more difficult by our necessary isolation from each other. How we long to reach out and reassure one another with a hug or a touch. However, the story of Lazarus is all about Jesus the *Word* of God. In contrast to many other miracles, where Jesus touches and even puts mud and spittle on people's eyes, the raising of Lazarus happens with words: 'Lazarus, come out!' When Jesus speaks, the dead man hears and is restored to life. The Messiah we worship and follow is the living Word of God and we can bring Him to one another in words. Pick up the phone, email, text, Whatsapp or any other way you know to offer one another the Word of God to encourage, comfort and give hope.

A Meditation and prayer on the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45)

Word of God, who was and is and is to come

Dwell in our hearts and mouths

That we may be kept in the safety beyond all fears

That we may lead others to Your loving arms

We kneel at your feet and cry out to you

We hear your voice and come to you

The Resurrection and the Life

Amen