

Reading John 11, with a focus on verses 17-28 and 38-45.

Introduction

Good morning everyone, this is the 2nd Sunday we do not have a service in church, but some of you may attend this as a virtual zoom meeting, whilst others will read this sermon as a transcript.

I hope that you have been keeping well, not only physically but also mentally and spiritually. Life is not easy for those of us who have to isolate. Adriana and I have been isolating as I have had a persistent cough, and although I have not had a temperature, I have had other flu-like symptoms.

Story of Lazarus

You may have forgotten, but we are still on our journey in Lent towards Easter, which will be in two weeks time! And our reading from the Lectionary brings us to John 11, where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. We have read a few excerpts from this. In summary, we hear that Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha is sick and then dies. Jesus decides not to go straight away, but he waits and seeks the family out when he knows that Lazarus is dead. On arrival he meets first with Mary and then with Martha

and then makes his way to the grave where Lazarus is buried. There he commands the grave to be opened and after praying to his Father he then commands Lazarus to come out. People are astounded to see that after four days in the grave Lazarus comes out still wrapped in his grave clothes.

Questions

In the story a lot of questions are put to Jesus. Why did you wait until he died? Why could you not heal him? Now, it is too late. Why do you want to open the grave – it will stink. All of these questions relate to the identity of Jesus. Who is he? Who does he claim he is? And who do people think he is?

The key statement that Jesus makes of himself we see in vss 25-26:

“I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life

One thing that the Corona virus does, it makes us (personally) aware of our mortality. Western Society is very good at hiding that fact that we all have to die. And if people speak about the

dead then they comfort each other with that they are now in heaven. And just in case someone may question that premise, people change the subject quite rapidly. There are far more important things to talk about surely, for instance, work, sport, leisure... i.e. all the things that society worships instead of God. As that worship distracts us from the reality.

The reality is that we all die. The reality is also that we not all will have eternal live. Jesus puts it very succinctly into two statements:

- The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;
- whoever lives by believing in me will never die

Jesus promises not only eternal life, but that this eternal life has started as soon as we have accepted him as a Lord and Saviour. Jesus judges us at the end on what we have done, but gives us life eternal if we believe in him. But then he also says that if we believe in him our lives cannot stay the same – he says: I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

But what does it mean to have life to the full. Firstly, we do not fear anything – Corona Virus, Brexit, Apocalypse, Death... as we know that Jesus has promised us life beyond any of this.

Secondly, we live according to his will: Love God above all and Love your Neighbour as yourself. This means living live to the full: to love God and to love each other! That may translate itself to different things, as God calls us each differently and gives us different gifts Some are pastors, others evangelists, others have received the ministry of helps and again others are called to address injustices in society, but all this comes from the same motivation and drive: that we believe in Jesus and that he then gives us live to the full.

How do we know? Lazarus' resurrection is a foreshadowing of Jesus own resurrection at Easter. In the end Lazarus also had to die, but as he believes in Jesus he also shared in his final resurrection. As we will share in his resurrection too, if we believe in Jesus Christ as our Messiah. This does not only change our death, but this also changes our lives.

So I urge you in this time to live the resurrection live: do not fear but love one another. And at this time you may also have more time to do the other things that God is always asking us: To love him above all else. As when we do that and spend time in his presence, he will change us: as the next song says: "Knowing you, Jesus, [...]. there is no greater thing". "You're my all and

I love you, Lord.” And out of our Love for Jesus, the world will know his love too.

Amen

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ALL I ONCE HELD DEAR, built my life upon,
All this world reveres, and wars to own,
All I once thought gain I have counted loss;
Spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing You, Jesus,
Knowing You, there is no greater thing.
You're my all, You're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love You, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to know You more,
To be found in You and known as Yours.
To possess by faith what I could not earn,
All-surpassing gift of righteousness.

Oh, to know the power of Your risen life,
And to know You in Your sufferings.
To become like You in Your death, my Lord,
So with You to live and never die.

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