

DEATH AND EMOTION

JOHN 11:1-43

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

John 11: 32-35

When it touches us, death leaves us confused and hurting. We feel a sense of inadequacy as we sit by the elderly and watch their lives slip away – whether it is in peace or pain we mourn for the gap that their passing leaves in the world, and our inability to hold onto their presence just a little longer. When the young die we feel a sense of injustice and the pain is raw. Why could we not protect this life – why did God allow this to happen?

Death strips away all our defences and pretensions - we are not in control. It is even more poignant when we know that if we had the resources or technology to hand then we could have saved this life. Our helplessness leaves us feeling so angry.

Mary must have felt so many of these emotions as she watched her brother die, but added to this is the sense of having been failed by her Lord and friend – if Jesus had been there this would not have happened – who can imagine the turmoil of her emotions as Jesus appears on the scene four days later. Yet when he comes he does so in compassion, with real depth of feeling, and not four days too late as we might at first think, but right on time to demonstrate God's glory.

Death is a hard reminder to us all that we have rejected God, and Jesus is deeply moved in spirit and troubled by the very presence of death in the world. Death was the consequence for rejecting God in Genesis 2:17 and is a deeply painful reminder to God of the rebelliousness of his creation as he watches that which he created to be pleasing and good, suffer, face pain and die. It is right that we should feel a sense of anger and outrage over death – it is not part of God's good creation and has no part in his glorious new creation (Rev 21:4). It is right that we should feel impotent in the face of death – to remember that ultimate authority and control is God's and not ours. It is right that we should weep and mourn with the grieving and at the presence of death – Jesus wept as he stood by the grave of his friend.

But it is also right that we should remember that death is also just a gateway through which we must all pass. Physical death is inescapable, but there is a life beyond it. How prepared are we for what comes beyond physical death? Jesus demonstrates not only his control over death, but also his victory as he raises his friend Lazarus back to life and in his own resurrection from the dead. In both of these Jesus confirms

his claim that he is the resurrection and the life. That whoever believes in him will live even though he dies and that whoever lives and believes in him will never die (John 11:25-26).

It is right to feel the pain of death, but there is a glorious hope for all who trust in Christ that death is not the end, but the gateway to eternal life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- **It is right to feel all sorts of emotion in the presence of death – Jesus himself felt both sadness (35) and anger (33 – that’s the sense of the phrase ‘troubled in spirit’). How can we help the grieving to feel their pain *with* God, and not *against* him?**
- **How do we respond to those who see death as a merciful release:**
 - **When the deceased is a Christian?**
 - **When the deceased is not a Christian?**
- **In verse 25, Jesus comforts Martha with talk of eternal life. How can meditating on eternal life help comfort us when faced with our own impending death and the death of those close to us or our patient’s deaths? Try to be specific if you can.**
- **How does this passage show the devastating consequences of our rebellion against God?**
- **How does this passage proclaim the glory of Christ?**