



5th Sunday of Lent – 29 March 2020

Passiontide begins

British Summer Time begins

John 11: 1 – 45

Now a man named Lazarus was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay ill, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is ill.'

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, 'This illness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.'

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.'

⁸ 'But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?'

⁹ Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.'

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.' ¹² His disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.' ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'

¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from

Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ 'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'

²³ Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

²⁴ Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

²⁵ Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

²⁷ 'Yes, Lord,' she replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. 'The Teacher is here,' she said, 'and is asking for you.' ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² 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.' 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!' ³⁷ But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ 'Take away the stone,' he said. 'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.'

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.'

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth round his face.

Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. (©NIV 2011)

Prayer can be frustrating. We are encouraged to pray for others and for ourselves. But why is it that some prayers are answered but others aren't answered in the way we want? I prayed against the spread of the coronavirus, but it's very much with us.

In our reading today, we see that Mary and Martha, friends of Jesus, send word (they prayed) to him saying that their brother, Lazarus is sick. Clearly, they want Jesus to come and heal him. But Jesus doesn't; he stays where he is for 2 more days. As a result, Lazarus dies, and Mary and Martha grieve. Only later do they see the bigger picture that Jesus sees from the start (see v4).

I think this account of the raising of Lazarus has much to teach us about how God responds to us in suffering. We see that Jesus acts in his own time, not to anyone else's agenda, and that, though he is in control, he does not prevent suffering. Instead, Jesus enters into our suffering with us and he takes risks to do so. In this passage, the disciples warn Jesus that very recently the Jews in Jerusalem (which is close to Bethany), tried to kill him (v8). They might do it again! Others grumbled that Jesus

had not done enough (v37). Even so, Jesus shares our suffering. John 11v35 is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it speaks volumes about Jesus's love for us: "Jesus wept". Today we enter Passiontide with its focus on the cross and there Jesus not only enters into our suffering, but he suffers in our place.

Finally, and marvellously, Jesus transforms our sufferings, bringing hope. The raising of Lazarus brought joy out of despair for his family and friends. For us, it is a foreshadowing, a promise of resurrection to eternal life. Lazarus was raised, but only to die again. Jesus was raised after his death on the Cross, to eternal life.

In our present suffering, the Lord is with us, he is here to share our sorrow, calm our fears and transform our suffering to bring the hope of eternal life. The last verse of our reading shows that many people "put their faith in" Jesus, but the chapter goes on to show that others didn't, they rejected him and lost out on the promise of eternal life.

In this current crisis, in the whole of our lives, let us put our faith in Jesus, so that, no matter what happens, we have the sure hope of resurrection with him into eternal life.

The collect for the 5th Sunday of Lent

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, on God, now and for ever.

Amen.