

John 11:1 – 45

How many people today are wishing that their loved one was still with them?

How many are wishing that they hadn't died; that somehow there had been a miracle to cure them?

How many are wishing that God had answered their prayers and saved their loved ones from death?

We are all too aware today that many more people are grieving for loved ones who have died through contracting the Coronavirus and many more are still likely to die before it is under control. The world is gripped by fear and grief. The virus has spread rapidly in Europe and is beginning to do so here. Some people are turning to their faith to get them through while others are blaming God and each other because the threat has not been taken seriously enough and advice has not always been clear. People have taken risks because they need to work and those at the front line of the NHS and our food and medical supplies are buckling under the weight of keeping people alive and supporting them.

Where is God in the midst of this crisis?

Right here with us; feeling our anxiousness and fear; our sorrow and grief; our anger and hopelessness.

On learning that Lazarus was very ill Jesus didn't go immediately to him but waited two days. What was he doing? Why wasn't he hurrying to the bedside of his friend and healing him? He could have saved him from death. It might seem strange to us that Jesus delayed but to Martha and Mary it must have seemed heartless. Jesus needed time to process this news just like any of us who are told our loved one is gravely ill. He needed time to pray for Lazarus and discern what action God wanted him to take. We should remember that Jesus didn't make everyone he met well; some people weren't cured but could testify to what they had seen him do.

When Jesus does go to Bethany he learns that his friend has died and he is greeted by Martha, whose grief manifests through anger; a common expression when a loved one has needlessly died. This contrasts with Mary's grief as she falls at his feet and weeps. Although both sisters tell Jesus that if he had been there their brother would not have died, Jesus' response is different. To Martha's anger, he questions her faith in him as the Messiah, but Mary's tears disturb his spirit and move him deeply. He feels immense compassion, perhaps more than humanly possible, and he weeps.

The Son of God cries for, and with, those he loves, as much today as he did then. He continues to bear the weight of our burdens, interceding for us, and putting before the Father all our needs and concerns.

When Jesus thanks God for hearing his request, he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, fully restored to health. Although Lazarus' earthly life will later end, his temporary resurrection is a signpost to Jesus' own resurrection, which is anything but temporary. Jesus told Martha he was the resurrection and the life and that those who believed in him, even though they died, would live and everyone who lives and believes in him will never die (v25-26). He then asks, 'Do you believe this?'

Jesus asks people the same question today. Do we believe in him as Lord and Saviour; the one God sent into the world to save humanity so that all people might live through him when their earthly lives are done.

As more people are faced with the prospect of losing loved ones through this virus, or indeed their own lives, let us pray that they will meet with Jesus and accept his gift of eternal life.