

Pain

2 4 17

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.

Our text, this morning, may be found in John's gospel, chapter 11 and verse 35:

'Jesus began to weep.'

Passiontide begins today, a fortnight to look forward to Easter. And to set the mood and tone for this time of preparation for the story of the Passion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our gospel reading from John chapter 11 describes the death and raising from the dead of Jesus' friend, Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. It is a beautiful story of love and loss and restoration and, today, using as our text the shortest verse in the Bible, **'Jesus wept'** as the King James Bible renders the Greek, **εδακρυσεν ο Ιησους**, let us consider the truth of what it means to be human.

I am by nature an optimist. I try to look on the bright side, to smile, to laugh, to see light and joy and what is good in life, good in this life we lead. But even here in Dinard, we cannot be blind or deaf to the truth that though life is good, there

are many bad things too. If we can experience pleasure, then we must also be open to pain. If we can know the joy of loving someone, of friendship, of fellowship, of family, kith and kin, then we can know the pain of separation, of loss, of being bereft. Sadly, death is a fact of life.

And so, today, the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is a timely reminder of the facts of life and death, the balance of grief and joy, of loss and restoration. Jesus hears of his friends' illness. He delays going to Bethany till after Lazarus has died. He meets Martha who tells him clearly that had he been there earlier then her brother would not have died. He meets Mary who is in tears. He himself weeps. He prays to God in front of the tomb, thanking God for restoring Lazarus to life even before the tomb has been opened. Lazarus stumbles out of the tomb into the light of day, still wrapped in his grave clothes.

So why am I optimistic in the face of pain, of suffering, of death? Simply because like Mother Julian of Norwich, the mediaeval mystic, I believe that 'all will be well'. Why? Because, in the first place, we are all lucky to be alive, lucky to know the joy of living, breathing, seeing, hearing, feeling. Yes, of course, there is real pain, real heartache, real choice. And we can suffer through our own bad choices and because of the bad choices of others. But though life necessarily begins with birth and inevitably must end with death, as Christians we believe that death is not the end but that there is a life hereafter, the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Three times in the gospels, Jesus raises someone from the dead. Jairus's daughter (Matthew 9 v18 - 26), the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7 v11 - 17), and here, his friend Lazarus. Three times we hear of the possibility of being restored to life and then, in the account of the first Easter Day, in all four gospels we read of Jesus rising from the dead, a sign that death has been defeated, the death of death, and the ultimate triumph of the love of God over the consequences of sin, of wrong-doing.

But there is a cost and God is prepared to pay the price. God, in the person of his Son, Jesus, was born and lived and died. God, as Jesus, knows first-hand what it's like to be embodied in the flesh like any one of us is. He knows the joy and the pain of life. Like us, he can shed tears; like us, he can be rejected, mocked and suffer pain; like us, he has to die. But, at the end of it all, there is the fact of the empty tomb and the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

So why am I an optimist? Essentially, I am because I delight in the possibilities of this life; I accept the downsides while trying to mitigate them; and I trust in the promise of the life of the world to come. May you also be able to do the same.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist
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