

Sermon 6 April 2014  
Psalm 130 John 11:1-45 'Raised Up'

*Prayer: When we are overwhelmed or in despair, we turn again to you, O God, for you feel our anguish and will raise us up. Breathe your Spirit into us and give us new life so that when we wait we are watchful and when we walk it is in hope. Amen.*

Sunday – Lent 5, this is the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday on our Lent journey for 2014 and like the past few weeks we've been given a fantastic – *long* Gospel story for our reflections. A story of sadness, grief, tears, mystery, death and the threat of death but also of new life, of being called out, of a community being given jobs to do and of the possible consequences when we risk loving like God in Jesus loved. I offer two challenges for our individual Lenten self-audit: 1. how does this Gospel passage speak into the inside places of my faith, my life and 2. How does it speak to the outward expression of my life, my faith?

I will remind you of these challenges later – for now I wonder how many of us get side-tracked into thinking the focus of the Gospel passage is Lazarus? Perhaps Jesus? When **Jesus** wants us to 'hear' / 'see' that **it is God** – and for Jesus it is only ever "God" that is the focus – **all he does** is to glorify God, show God's glory, and act to reveal God...

So today is not about Mary (a grieving sister and a woman disciple of Jesus), not about Martha (a grieving sister and the first to confess he was the Messiah), nor Mary / Martha's Jewish visitors (some of whom came to believe in Jesus), nor Jesus's disciples (who know this visit might cause their death), nor Jesus himself, nor Lazarus... **It was to bring glory to God.**

One of the things we are supposed to do in Lent is to follow a self-examination programme, a self-faith audit as preparation for Easter. Let me share for a moment what is happening in the F-D household. We have decided to take the plunge and re-decorate our kitchen- dining room. We decided to paint and not re-paper the walls. I organised 3 painters to visit and give me quotes for the cost – mmmmm that's when we decided if we took the wall paper off *ourselves* it might help lower the costs. So the men in our household are busily engaged in stripping wall paper.

It's not easy! Wallpaper is there not just to 'look' pretty, but also to protect – the walls. It's on tight, too much soaking and the underlying board starts to soften and be scraped away, not enough and the paper doesn't come off. It's very messy sometimes big strips come off easily and sometimes it's frustrating because its tiny bits scrapped off piece by piece. They have also learnt that the ease with which the 'top' layer is removed depends on the one underneath. Having the right tools also helps! And as I was writing my sermon I wondered if what I am seeing as a process 'at home' is a little like our lives and what the Lenten challenge is about.

In life we wrap ourselves up – to look pretty, to look strong, to protect and to cover.... Usually we do this positively and well **and sometimes** we do it for the wrong reasons whether those reasons are deliberate or self-survival. Lent is the time in the wisdom of the church when we check to see the state of the 'wallpaper' coverings of our lives. Is it ok – or is it time for a shedding of layers, some to come down/ off because in faith terms – they are stopping us from doing our job? We have become too bound by covering layers **to see** or **do** God's work?

Jesus says the point of it all is to be **part of God's work**; to bring glory to God so it's not about 'us' how good, clever, wise, loud, organised, much we can give, how important, how hurt, grieving, sad, worried... It's about how we can allow our lives **point** to God. How we can allow the things that happened or happen to us to speak to a bigger truth of God at work and His **glory made real** in us. Cv

An assurance I believe both scriptures give us is the truth that when the glory of God is made real in us – **it really is us**. Jesus (therefore God) wants the 'real' us to be involved, not covered up or hidden under

false layering! Ps 130 is a passionate out pouring of emotion to God. We don't know *just what* kind of "depths" the writer means but I think in our shared humanity we do recognise when there!

All kinds of life experiences can plunge us into the depths – disappointment, medical conditions or health, employment loss, betrayal, victimisation, envy, jealousy, insecurity, grief... The depths of life are real for us and for the psalmist, who out of their life experience gives us these beautiful words for the assurance of our faith. cV

No matter how deep you feel life has plunged you – God is there, God is listening. No matter how bad you feel because of the difference between the purity of God and our humanity – God is there, God is listening. **God loves you – steadfastly!** Your value **begins in the love** God has for you and that is what motivates God on your behalf, on the world's behalf to 'be there, to listen'. Cv

The challenge for us when in one of those deep places is to '**wait**' for God. In Hebrew the word for 'wait' is also translated as '**to hope**'. \*H Wallace says that in the context of this psalm 'waiting' is an intimate part of hope. \*"And this is what the psalmist also urges on Israel, the whole people. This God who is powerful to redeem is nevertheless not one to be manipulated, or coerced, or bribed. This is one who acts in their own time and for whom we must wait. But such waiting is not without confidence.

The psalmist compares their own waiting to that of the sentinel who watches for the morning... The imagery is meant to evoke a sense of vigilance and care, whichever imaginative line we take. Our hoping and waiting for the Lord should never be a time of inactivity, or just sitting around thinking nothing much is happening right now. Our hope is active and positive. It is never reactive and 'down time'. Moreover, the image of the watcher for the morning underlines an element of certainty and confidence. Whatever the morning may bring in our imaginations, it will come. The psalmist suggests that hope in the Lord, waiting for the lord, is never in vain, even in deathly circumstances."

And deathly circumstances was one of those deep places that Martha and Mary were in, and in what to us is mystery; **Jesus told them to 'wait'**. Martha reveals one level of understanding about that waiting and hoping because she believed in eternal life. And as our teachings have been over the past few weeks, Jesus reveals another level for faith, he really raises up Lazarus! Those who believe in Jesus will find life in him. Loader says: "It is eternal life, which includes timelessness or eternity in the temporal sense, but the focus is quality not quantity. It is sharing the life of God here and **now** and forever." The writer John is pushing **us to see** the layers of meaning **for faith** here.

It is for us not to get caught in the swirling emotions of this dramatic story nor by the fact we know the storm clouds are gathering for Jesus last Passover and our first Easter. It is for us to see that this story is to keep the eyes of the faithful on God; **who in love is there and is listening!** All the signs / miracles that Jesus did were for the glory of God to be made real among us. Miracles and signs at to open our eyes to God's glory, they are to point us to what God is at work doing, to raise our eyes in faith to **see the more** of the event, ever growing in faith and trust.

Jesus raised Lazarus – but **had you realised** that his work was not completed until those who heard Jesus commands to roll the stone away, and then "unbind" Lazarus acted, and then Lazarus was set free to live. The community surrounding Jesus that day had tasks to do. Yes, Jesus raised Lazarus but it was the work of the community to set him free! Cv

In a Lenten invitation: May you to reflect that God loves you, is there for you waiting and listening as you wait for Him; May your reflections send you on a search for any inside places within that have been covered over and need to be stripped away; May you reflect on the outward expression of your life as you work in community to follow Jesus commands to set people free. May you allow yourself to be raised up that the glory of God will be made real in your life. Amen