

+WEEKLY SERMON

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The Raising of Lazarus Teashop

Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.' John 15.39

I remember visiting Bethany some years ago and having the privilege of entering the tomb of Lazarus. There having thought deeply about Jesus' wonderful miracle, I emerged into the bright sunlight to be confronted by a loud tourist with a video camera filming each pilgrim coming out of the tomb and shouting, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And then I saw a large sign across the road advertising 'The Raising of Lazarus Teashop'. It all seemed rather incongruous, but got me thinking.

Mary and Martha were distraught about their brother's death. They had sent for Jesus, but he had only arrived four days after Lazarus had been buried. When Jesus commanded them to open up the tomb, Martha, the ever practical one, pointed out that by then there would be a bad stench. However as soon as the tomb was opened, Jesus thanked God for answering his prayer. I wonder why? I think the answer must be that when the tomb was opened there was no stench. And so Jesus knew that Lazarus' body was not decaying and that his prayer had been heard.

This Bible reading is set for All Saints Day, which many churches are celebrating this weekend. The feast of All Saints celebrates the resurrection life shared by all those who have died in the faith of Christ. Lazarus was resuscitated by Jesus, to the joy of his sisters, but he would have died again one day. However, his raising from the tomb by Jesus was a sign pointing forward to Jesus' own death and resurrection, when Jesus would be raised to life, never to die again.

At this season of All Saints many of us remember loved ones who have died in the faith of Christ. We do so in the sure and certain hope that, because Jesus rose again from the dead, he has conquered death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in him. When we lose a loved one grief is very real. As the late Queen Elizabeth once said, 'Grief is the price we pay for love.'

But in Christ we know the best is yet to be. One day we shall be part of that great company, reunited with those whom we see no longer, lost in wonder, love and praise of God.

Happy All-Saintstide!

Mark Ireland, Archdeacon of Blackburn