

Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Lent. John 11:1-45

Jesus and His disciples get a message, Lazarus is ill, his sisters are asking Jesus to come. We might expect Jesus to make all speed to go to his friend's bedside. Instead, it seems as though He is holding off. We might wonder why this should be, why does He not set off immediately? Jesus' disciples have been telling Him not to go to Jerusalem because the Judeans are out to get Him. Bethany is near to Jerusalem, so it would be a danger zone. Jesus suggests that this illness will not be fatal but will lead to God's glory. So, He waits. Is Jesus waiting until the time is right? Is He waiting so that what will happen can be more spectacular? This would appear to be a trifle callous on Jesus' part, quite unlike Him. God's time is not like ours. We often want God to act and to act now, to do what we think should be done. God acts in His own way and in His own time not ours.

By the time Jesus arrives Lazarus is dead and already buried some four days ago. Maybe if Jesus had set out straight away, He would have been too late anyway. Martha, hearing that Jesus is on His way goes to meet Him. Jesus is waiting discreetly away from the wailing crowds of mourners. Martha calls Mary, they meet with Jesus, 'If only you had been here.' Another phrase that we use, 'if only', as if we know what should have been as we look back - if only! Jesus is moved by their sorrow and weeps openly with them. As He weeps with us and shares our sorrows and weeps over the world and the mess we make of everything. Jesus tells Martha, "Your brother will rise again". Martha assumes that He is meaning resurrection, the last day, but Jesus says to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live."

Jesus goes to the tomb where Lazarus has been laid. A tomb hollowed from the rock because it is too stony to dig in the ground. He asks for the rock to be rolled away from the entrance, despite warnings that bodily decay may already have begun. Jesus calls Lazarus – "Lazarus Come out!" and he does come out, wrapped in the grave clothes. Jesus asks, "Unbind him, let him go." Jesus says to them, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the Glory of God."

This story is more about Jesus than it is about Lazarus. Jesus is pointing us to His own resurrection. He calls Lazarus out of the grave and asks that Lazarus is unbound, released. He says, "I am the resurrection!" By his resurrection we too are called out from the grave, we are unbound and set free, to follow Jesus.

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