

Sermon for Sunday 29/03/2020 (Gospel Reading: John 11:32-45), Revd. Gemma Donnell

Writing a sermon is not an usual thing for me... but to prepare a sermon to be preached in my own living room... live on Facebook... That's a new experience for me! However, I am fairly confident that none of us are spending our weeks in ways we were expecting to a month or so ago. I'm thankful however that our readings this morning seem to be so fitting... After all, in such extraordinary times where we might be feeling that things around us are not thriving or growing a story about a valley dry bones seems appropriate... More significantly today we are also presented with Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from death. In this gospel passage we meet Christ who weeps with us and we are presented with the evidence of God making good come from death, change and destruction.

There is a beauty and comfort in the story of Jesus raising Lazarus and I am really fond of this Gospel passage. But it is also a story where we don't completely understand Jesus, as so many Gospel stories are. Jesus knows that Lazarus is dying but doesn't choose to go and save him. He doesn't intervene to save Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters from pain and loss. He doesn't rush to heal his friend... instead he waits. When he arrives, Mary expresses this to Jesus... reminding him that he had the power to heal. Despite this Jesus goes to his friend's grave and weeps. Jesus knew he was going to call Lazarus to come out, he would have known that Lazarus was to be restored to life and re-join them and yet still he weeps.

Jesus weeps for the pain Mary and Martha are experiencing. He weeps for loss of his friend despite knowing there was to be joy in the future. I don't know about you, but I find that incredibly comforting. I've wept over the last few weeks. I've wept to know people are suffering and struggling, I've wept knowing I can't see my own loved ones and I've wept for myself simply because these are difficult times. The affect of COVID-19 and our lockdown is going to impact us all very differently. For many of us we might feel low, anxious or tearful. We might feel physically unwell... we might feel listless, or energetic... angry... All these reactions physical, emotional and spiritual are completely valid because what we are experiencing is significant. Jesus wept because in that moment there was pain and grief and he shared in it. I believe Jesus shares in our experiences now. God is with us.

It's such a complicated question to consider why when God can act: does he act only in some situations but not in others. We cannot comprehend an answer. We cannot know for certain why Jesus did not heal Lazarus before his death. But we do know that Lazarus' restoration to life glorified God. Just as the beautifully human things that are happening during this tragic time in our country are glorifying God. For example when the NHS reached out last week for a quarter million volunteers, twice as many, half a million people signed up in twenty-four hours. When we were asked to honour those working in the NHS at 8pm this past Thursday evening I could hear applause from all over the area and saw later videos of the whole country doing this. I know that I along with the rest of the ministry team and Church wardens having been reaching out to those on our Church database. These phone calls have been as much support to me as I have been able to offer to others... people are speaking hope to me as they describe how they are caring for or being cared for by neighbours. They're describing changing attitudes, renewed community and a sense of thankfulness of heart for the weather, for their families and for all that they have. Just as in the story of Ezekiel and the dry bones, as in Jesus' raising of Lazarus, I see in the stories I'm being told evidence of God making good come from change, pain and destruction.

These are changing, challenging, confusing and difficult times. Yet I believe God is with us all. We as a Parish want to support you all as much as we can, and to offer hope wherever possible. We hope to go

on live streaming Sunday Services, as we all learn how to use technology! We also plan to post sermons, intercessions and a daily thought for the day via email and available on the website. If you need support from us do please get in touch, we have people who can make daily phone calls if you want to talk, people who can support with shopping and we are all happy to pray for you. I'd like to encourage you to search out what good God is doing around you and be thankful for it. Perhaps you'd benefit from keeping a record of these things in a gratitude journal or by taking a photo to reflect on. Focusing on seeing the good things around us will help us all to keep going during the next few weeks and hopefully remind us that when we do struggle, that this is completely okay, and that Jesus wept as well. Yet he is with us changing change, destruction and pain into good. Amen.