

Renewed in Hope

Week 5: Hope brings life to death

When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Sir, come and see. And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him." But some of them said, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?" So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me." And when he had said this, He cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go." [John 11.32-44]

Video Summary

Jesus might have chosen another way. The arguments of his disciples were strong ones. How can you go back to Judea? They mean to kill you. Why put your own life at risk for the sake of Lazarus whose life is wasting away? Then Jesus chooses to defy his fears – and what might seem like common sense – and goes. Compassion for others is the source and spring of hope in action – the same compassion that moved Jesus to go to his friend in need.

Hope chooses to go to the places of hurt. Hope brings life into the places of death. Hope knows fear, yet is not bound by it.

How will we express hope? Pope Francis refers to the Church as a Field Hospital; choosing to be where people are suffering, rather than staying safe or defending its own interests:

'This is the mission of the Church: to heal the wounds of the heart, to open doors, to free people'.

There are many ways we can travel the way of hope with Jesus to wherever Lazarus lies:

- Caring for one person you see to be in need.
- Being part of a movement or initiative that seeks to provide for a group of people who are denied basic human needs, or the respect due to them.
- Challenging the misuse of power that results in people being excluded or treated unjustly

We will probably not need to look around too far to know where to begin.

Some questions for groups:

- Where have you seen compassionate action at work in response to human need?
- What fears sometimes hold us back from acting with compassion?
- How might God be calling you as a church to respond to the needs of people in your neighbourhood?
- What else struck you in the video?

Some personal exercises for reflection and prayer

Praying the Gospel using imaginative contemplation

As the name suggests, in this way of prayer we use our imagination to help set the scene of a Gospel event.

Before you begin, read the passage [John 11.1-44]. Then still yourself down – listen to the sounds around you or become aware of your breathing. Now use your senses to enter the Gospel. For example, you may be drawn to the moment when Jesus stands before Lazarus' tomb. Listen to the sounds of the gathered crowd, the weeping of Lazarus' sisters, the quiet conversation of those who see Jesus arrive. Feel the heat of the day, the stony ground beneath your feet. Look around at the people gathered, and the place of the tomb.

Now place yourself in the scene. Perhaps you are there as part of the group of mourners, or alongside Martha and Mary. Perhaps it's you in the place of Lazarus, lying in the tomb.

Now see, or sense Jesus come forward, listen to his voice as he cries out. What do you feel when you hear his voice?

What is happening now in the scene – and what is happening in your own spirit as you contemplate it? Notice what moves you.

Now talk with Jesus about what you have felt or become aware of. You may sense him speaking to you too. Is there an invitation to you coming from this moment?

Stay with the moment – allow what you have received to soak in.

At the end of your time of contemplating the passage, spend some minutes remembering what you saw, heard or felt – and what moved you in some way.

Travelling the way of hope

This week, reflect on any way you – individually or together – might be called to travel the way of hope for someone, or some group, in need.

Look out for any small opportunity to step out of your own self-preoccupation to step into responding to someone who needs your care. Often, it's someone near at hand.

What does the Lord require of you?
but to do justice,
to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God
Micah 6.6-8