

New Life in Jesus

John 11.17-27 Sermon given 29/3/20 by Rev Ruth Moriarty

Did you know that what happens in our lives effects how we read the bible? If you don't believe that, let me say I have never before I have really noticed there was a crowd of people jammed into Martha and Mary's house to mourn Lazarus. It has never jarred with me – a crowd! Unrelated people in one house – haven't these people heard of social distancing? Never before have I wanted to be in a crush of people again, never before have I realised what a privilege it is to be able to attend a funeral, to be able to comfort those who mourn, to be able to hug another person. Never before have we felt so cut off from each other, hemmed in, locked down, spread out and feeling like zombies. Never before have we experienced coronavirus.

The crowd have gathered from far and wide – what a privilege! To do what? To comfort Martha and Mary for Lazarus is dead, their brother is buried, and a time of mourning has begun. Jesus isn't there. Word gets to the house that he is nearby, but still out on the road. And Martha is cross, a bit tetchy I think – Jesus you're late. Jesus if you'd been here – he'd be alive. Jesus if you'd been here, we wouldn't be weeping, Jesus if you'd been here there wouldn't have been so much pain.

And yet as she says this, she outside her house seeking Jesus. She has shown who she knows him to be with her very actions before any words fall out of her mouth. By walking out she is seeking Jesus and recognising the necessity of his presence. And what words come from this sister:

I know that God will give you whatever you ask him for
I know that that you are the Messiah
I know that you are the Son of God
I know that you are part of God's divine plan to save the world.

Marvellous Martha – a woman of faith, a woman of intelligence, a woman who can see the authority that Jesus has and recognises his power. Throughout John's gospel women speak the truth about God, women proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. Martha is different to the woman at the well though for she has a name, a status, and hutzpah. Guts to push through the crowd and go out to find Jesus. Guts to speak to him boldly, guts to believe. Jesus likes gutsy women. Jesus likes gutsy people! Martha hears

Jesus say that he is the resurrection and the life, and her response is: yes Lord! Yes, Lord I believe.

Last week I went to a large supermarket to buy some food. Normally that sentence wouldn't make it into a sermon – but these are extraordinary times. I wanted to buy some meat – I thought maybe a leg of lamb for Mother's Day lunch? However the shelves were bare. There was no meat to be had, not any apart from some pricey sausages which had wheat in – so no go for the coeliac in our house. I returned later to a small supermarket near me and bought a chicken. An ordinary chicken – what a delight it was! I felt like I was back war times – telling people “hey I managed to get a chicken for Sunday lunch!!” If there is one thing that the times, we are living in now should teach us is to live for the present. Yes, we know that all of us can look forward to a banquet in heaven, yes we know like Martha did that we will all rise again, but knowing Jesus now means new life and resurrection now!

Life in God isn't just at the end of time. Life in God is now, even in our grieving for loss, even in our grieving for touch, for friends, for being closer than 2metres, there is life for Christ is with us. Life and glory of Christ begins now on earth through knowing him now, through believing in him now. What we believe about Jesus is important, and this belief will sustain us today and in the months to come. Jesus came to bring life, as he is present with us so he gives us life despite our circumstances.

Our second reading Psalm 130 speaks of living in the depths, where we are overwhelmed by information, fake news, scary times, times of worry and concern.

Hear afresh: death does not rule, Christ does. God is always seeking to bring life to us. So, we wait today and hope, we hope in the God who is steadfast, who grants trust to us that we might have strength and courage from the certainty of what is yet to be.

The Lord has authority over death, he has power. He steadfast in his love therefore he will redeem us, freedom will come. He is the resurrection and the life.

To which we say? Yes Lord!

Yes, Lord I believe you are the Messiah
Yes, Lord I believe you are the Son of God
Yes, Lord though troubles may come, I will hope
Yes, Lord I will wait and watch for the morning, for you have all the power in the world.
May we say yes Lord, say yes to the Lord of life.