

““I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”. He is God not of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong!”

That’s what Jesus said when the Sadducees had asked Jesus a question about what life would be after death.

The Sadducees were the orthodox religious people of the time who didn’t believe that there was any life after death.

They believed that once you’re dead, you’re dead! Not an uncommon thought in modern secular culture.

And when you look at Isaiah 38: 18, we can see this idea mirrored in the words of Hezekiah.

“For Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.”

In effect the dead can’t worship God, only the living can do that!

But Jesus said you are quite wrong!

But it’s not that the dead in a shadowy underworld of Sheol CAN praise God.

No, it’s that God is the God of the living, and NOT the dead!

Today’s reading from John 11: 1 – 45, is set quite close to the time of Jesus’ passion.

The time when Jesus would confront all the forces that were opposed to God and God’s love, defeating them on the cross.

The raising of Lazarus took place very shortly before the events of Holy Week. According to John, it was the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from the tomb, and people were beginning to believe his message, that led to many of the authorities wanting Jesus dead!

During the description of these events we have the shortest verse in our Bible.

“Jesus wept”.

It goes on to say that Jesus was deeply moved, when he saw his friends mourning over the death of their brother and his friend Lazarus.

Jesus wept, might give you the wrong impression.

You might have a picture of Jesus quietly weeping.

Perhaps a solitary tear, slipping down his cheek into his neatly trimmed beard.

Or silent sobs of grief for a dead friend. Perhaps you imagine Jesus' shoulders rising and falling a little jerkily, betraying an inner hidden sorrow, that the writer had picked up on.

But that would be to miss the point. It lessens the impact of what was happening.

Remember Jesus had known that Lazarus was dead, he even delayed leaving where he was, before setting off for Bethany.

He already knew that he was going to raise his friend from the grave, he had already said as much.

So why did he weep?

A more accurate description of "wept" might be, snorted!! Like the snort of a war horse!
Which is how the same Greek word is used elsewhere.

Describing a more expressive, explosion of anger, emotion, sadness and even rage!

A screaming rage against death itself!!!

Jesus is showing us what God is like.

Feeling the pain and sorrow of his people, his friends.

Showing us a God who suffers with us, and who would suffer for us. To redeem the world.

Because, this is not the way that things should be!

After all, God is the God of life, not death.

Death is the final enemy to be overcome.

Jesus asked them "where have you laid him", foreshadowing the women asking where his own body had been laid, just a short time later.

And as a further foreshadowing, Jesus goes to the tomb, he has the stone removed, and then calls to Lazarus to "come out!".

Jesus calls Lazarus back from death, but Lazarus would die again.

Jesus however would pass all the way through death and be raised on the other side.

Not called to come back from death; but raised from death to eternal life.

Because God, is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Because Jesus was raised, we too will be raised, not in the way that Lazarus was raised back from the dead, but like Jesus, raised to . As death is conquered once and for all.

Death is not the end.

God is the God of the living not the dead.

God will raise us to life, we will be redeemed!

God does not save us from every peril, but he does redeem us!

He has redeemed us.

But we don't have to wait until after death to live!

We are invited to live a life now that leads to life, a oneness with God, and with each other, in a relationship of love.

We are invited into this now, just as Lazarus was brought out of the tomb of death to live again.

Jesus calls us out of the tomb of fear, mistrust, selfishness and self service, which is death, and into the life that we are offered in him.

For God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the God of the living and not the dead.

So how does all this relate to the specific circumstances that we find ourselves in today?

It's not exactly the same, but it might feel like we are all entombed in our admittedly comfortable houses, with access to TV and radio and telephones etc. but we are feeling the loss of the life full of the freedoms that we enjoyed up until very recently.

Maybe you feel that a large rock has been rolled across your front doors and you're are trapped inside. Waiting to be released. But wait we all must!

(Remember by staying in we are preventing the spread of this virus. Staying in is of vital help and service to others).

So as we wait, how will we spend this time, and who will we be, when the time comes for that stone to be rolled away, and we once again step outside into the fresh air?

Will we have spent the time growing closer to God, allowing God to breathe new life into us through prayer and reading the scriptures? Will we also have grown closer to our neighbours, our family, the lonely, will we long to help those in need and be determined to do our best to love our neighbour as ourselves?

Will we have learned to come out into the world to live life differently? To appreciate what we have? To look after each other more? To care for creation more? To take more time to live, rather than rushing again into busyness?

Or will we emerge unchanged, clinging to the shadows of a half life?

I pray that we will take the time to draw closer to God, listening to the voice of Jesus as he calls us into a new kingdom, a new way of living, a new way of being. Not just in the eternities, but here and now. I pray that as he calls us back into the world, we will live in his kingdom, doing his will on earth, as it is done in heaven, that it will be a new birth to live life well for him now.

We can do this knowing, trusting, that in the end we will be raised to life in him, who is the God of life and love.

Because God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the God of the living and not the dead.

May we live in him now and forever!

Amen.

with thanks to

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